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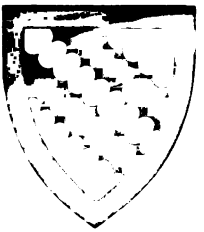

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MARCELLA

VOL. I.

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Mary A. Ward

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MARCELLA

From Alice Young.
1917.

BY

MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

AUTHOR OF "ROBERT ELSMERE," "THE HISTORY OF DAVID GRIEVE," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

New York
MACMILLAN AND CO.
AND LONDON
1894

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Set up and electrotyped March, 1894. Reprinted April twice, May, June, July, August three times, September, 1894.

Norwood Press:
J. S. Cushing & Co. — Berwick & Smith.
Boston, Mass., U.S.A.

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TO MY FATHER

I inscribe this Book

IN LOVE AND GRATITUDE

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BOOK I.

"If nature put not forth her power
About the opening of the flower,
Who is it that could live an hour?"

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MARCELLA.

CHAPTER I.

"THE mists — and the sun — and the first streaks of yellow in the beeches — beautiful! — *beautiful!*"

And with a long breath of delight Marcella Boyce threw herself on her knees by the window she had just opened, and, propping her face upon her hands, devoured the scene before her with that passionate intensity of pleasure which had been her gift and heritage through life.

She looked out upon a broad and level lawn, smoothed by the care of centuries, flanked on either side by groups of old trees — some Scotch firs, some beeches, a cedar or two — groups where the slow selective hand of time had been at work for generations, developing here the delightful roundness of quiet mass and shade, and there the bold caprice of bare fir trunks and ragged branches, standing black against the sky. Beyond the lawn stretched a green descent indefinitely long, carrying the eye indeed almost to the limit of the view, and becoming from the lawn onwards a wide irregular avenue, bordered by beeches of a splendid maturity, ending at last in a

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far distant gap where a gate — and a gate of some importance — clearly should have been, yet was not. The size of the trees, the wide uplands of the falling valley to the left of the avenue, now rich in the tints of harvest, the autumn sun pouring steadily through the vanishing mists, the green breadth of the vast lawn, the unbroken peace of wood and cultivated ground, all carried with them a confused general impression of well-being and of dignity. Marcella drew it in — this impression — with avidity. Yet at the same moment she noticed involuntarily the gateless gap at the end of the avenue, the choked condition of the garden paths on either side of the lawn, and the unsightly tufts of grass spotting the broad gravel terrace beneath her window.

"It *is* a heavenly place, all said and done," she protested to herself with a little frown. "But no doubt it would have been better still if Uncle Robert had looked after it and we could afford to keep the garden decent. Still —"

She dropped on a stool beside the open window, and as her eyes steeped themselves afresh in what they saw, the frown disappeared again in the former look of glowing content — that content of youth which is never merely passive, nay, rather, contains an invariable element of covetous eagerness.

It was but three months or so since Marcella's father, Mr. Richard Boyce, had succeeded to the ownership of Mellor Park the old home of the Boyces, and it was little more than six weeks since Marcella had received her summons home from the students' boarding-house in Kensington, where she

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had been lately living. She had ardently wished to assist in the June "settling-in," having not been able to apply her mind to the music or painting she was supposed to be studying, nor indeed to any other subject whatever, since the news of their inheritance had reached her. But her mother in a dry little note had let it be known that she preferred to manage the move for herself. Marcella had better go on with her studies as long as possible.

Yet Marcella was here at last. And as she looked round her large bare room, with its old dilapidated furniture, and then out again to woods and lawns, it seemed to her that all was now well, and that her childhood with its squalors and miseries was blotted out — atoned for by this last kind sudden stroke of fate, which might have been delayed so deplorably! — since no one could have reasonably expected that an apparently sound man of sixty would have succumbed in three days to the sort of common chill a hunter and sportsman must have resisted successfully a score of times before.

Her great desire now was to put the past — the greater part of it at any rate — behind her altogether. Its shabby worries were surely done with, poor as she and her parents still were, relatively to their present position. At least she was no longer the self-conscious schoolgirl, paid for at a lower rate than her companions, stinted in dress, pocket-money, and education, and fiercely resentful at every turn of some real or fancied slur; she was no longer even the half-Bohemian student of these past two years, enjoying herself in London so far as the iron necessity of keeping her

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boarding-house expenses down to the lowest possible figure would allow. She was something altogether different. She was Marcella Boyce, a "finished" and grown-up young woman of twenty-one, the only daughter and child of Mr. Boyce of Mellor Park, inheritress of one of the most ancient names in Midland England, and just entering on a life which to her own fancy and will, at any rate, promised the highest possible degree of interest and novelty.

Yet, in the very act of putting her past away from her, she only succeeded, so it seemed, in inviting it to repossess her.

For against her will, she fell straightway — in this quiet of the autumn morning — into a riot of memory, setting her past self against her present more consciously than she had done yet, recalling scene after scene and stage after stage with feelings of sarcasm, or amusement, or disgust, which showed themselves freely as they came and went, in the fine plastic face turned to the September woods.

She had been at school since she was nine years old — there was the dominant fact in these motley uncomfortable years behind her, which, in her young ignorance of the irrevocableness of living, she wished so impatiently to forget. As to the time before her school life, she had a dim memory of seemly and pleasant things, of a house in London, of a large and bright nursery, of a smiling mother who took constant notice of her, of games, little friends, and birthday parties. What had led to the complete disappearance of this earliest "set," to use a theatrical phrase, from the scenery of her childhood, Marcella did not yet

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adequately know, though she had some theories and many suspicions in the background of her mind. But at any rate this first image of memory was succeeded by another precise as the first was vague — the image of a tall white house, set against a white chalk cliff rising in terraces behind it and alongside it, where she had spent the years from nine to fourteen, and where, if she were set down blindfold, now, at twenty-one, she could have found her way to every room and door and cupboard and stair with a perfect and fascinated familiarity.

When she entered that house she was a lanky, black-eyed creature, tall for her age, and endowed or, as she herself would have put it, cursed with an abundance of curly unmanageable hair, whereof the brushing and tending soon became to a nervous clumsy child, not long parted from her nurse, one of the worst plagues of her existence. During her home life she had been an average child of the quick and clever type, with average faults. But something in the bare, ugly rooms, the discipline, the teaching, the companionship of Miss Frederick's Cliff House School for Young Ladies, transformed little Marcella Boyce, for the time being, into a demon. She hated her lessons, though, when she chose, she could do them in a hundredth part of the time taken by her companions; she hated getting up in the wintry dark, and her cold ablutions with some dozen others in the comfortless lavatory; she hated the meals in the long schoolroom, where, because twice meat was forbidden and twice pudding allowed, she invariably hungered fiercely for more mutton and scorned her second course, making a sort of dramatic

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story to herself out of Miss Frederick's tyranny and her own thwarted appetite as she sat black-browed and brooding in her place. She was not a favourite with her companions, and she was a perpetual difficulty and trouble to her perfectly well-intentioned schoolmistress. The whole of her first year was one continual series of sulks, quarrels, and revolts.

Perhaps her blackest days were the days she spent occasionally in bed, when Miss Frederick, at her wit's end, would take advantage of one of the child's perpetual colds to try the effects of a day's seclusion and solitary confinement, administered in such a form that it could do her charge no harm, and might, she hoped, do her good. "For I do believe a great part of it's liver or nerves! No child in her right senses could behave so," she would declare to the mild and stout French lady who had been her partner for years, and who was more inclined to befriend and excuse Marcella than any one else in the house — no one exactly knew why.

Now the rule of the house when any girl was ordered to bed with a cold was, in the first place, that she should not put her arms outside the bedclothes — for if you were allowed to read and amuse yourself in bed you might as well be up; that the housemaid should visit the patient in the early morning with a cup of senna-tea, and at long and regular intervals throughout the day with beef-tea and gruel; and that no one should come to see and talk with her, unless, indeed, it were the doctor, quiet being in all cases of sickness the first condition of recovery, and the natural schoolgirl in Miss Frederick's persuasion being

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more or less inclined to complain without cause if illness were made agreeable.

For some fourteen hours, therefore, on these days of durance Marcella was left almost wholly alone, nothing but a wild mass of black hair and a pair of roving, defiant eyes in a pale face showing above the bedclothes whenever the housemaid chose to visit her — a pitiable morsel, in truth, of rather forlorn humanity. For though she had her movements of fierce revolt, when she was within an ace of throwing the senna-tea in Martha's face, and rushing downstairs in her night-gown to denounce Miss Frederick in the midst of an astonished schoolroom, something generally interposed; not conscience, it is to be feared, or any wish "to be good," but only an aching, inmost sense of childish loneliness and helplessness; a perception that she had indeed tried everybody's patience to the limit, and that these days in bed represented crises which must be borne with even by such a rebel as Marcie Boyce.

So she submitted, and presently learnt, under dire stress of boredom, to amuse herself a good deal by developing a natural capacity for dreaming awake. Hour by hour she followed out an endless story of which she was always the heroine. Before the annoyance of her afternoon gruel, which she loathed, was well forgotten, she was in full fairy-land again, figuring generally as the trusted friend and companion of the Princess of Wales — of that beautiful Alexandra, the top and model of English society whose portrait in the window of the little stationer's shop at Marswell — the small country town near Cliff House — had attracted

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the child's attention once, on a dreary walk, and had ever since governed her dreams. Marcella had no fairy-tales, but she spun a whole cycle for herself around the lovely Princess who came to seem to her before long her own particular property. She had only to shut her eyes and she had caught her idol's attention — either by some look or act of passionate yet unobtrusive homage as she passed the royal carriage in the street — or by throwing herself in front of the divinity's runaway horses — or by a series of social steps easily devised by an imaginative child, well aware, in spite of appearances, that she was of an old family and had aristocratic relations. Then, when the Princess had held out a gracious hand and smiled, all was delight! Marcella grew up on the instant: she was beautiful, of course; she had, so people said, the "Boyce eyes and hair;" she had sweeping gowns, generally of white muslin with cherry-coloured ribbons; she went here and there with the Princess, laughing and talking quite calmly with the greatest people in the land, her romantic friendship with the adored of England making her all the time the observed of all observers, bringing her a thousand delicate flatteries and attentions.

Then, when she was at the very top of ecstasy, floating in the softest summer sea of fancy, some little noise would startle her into opening her eyes, and there beside her in the deepening dusk would be the bare white beds of her two dormitory companions, the ugly wall-paper opposite, and the uncovered boards with their frugal strips of carpet stretching away on either hand. The tea-bell would ring perhaps in the

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depths far below, and the sound would complete the transformation of the Princess's maid-of-honour into Marcie Boyce, the plain naughty child, whom nobody cared about, whose mother never wrote to her, who in contrast to every other girl in the school had not a single "party frock," and who would have to choose next morning between another dumb day of senna-tea and gruel, supposing she chose to plead that her cold was still obstinate, or getting up at half-past six to repeat half a page of Ince's "Outlines of English History" in the chilly schoolroom, at seven.

Looking back now as from another world on that unkempt fractious Marcie of Cliff House, the Marcella of the present saw with a mixture of amusement and self-pity that one great aggravation of that child's daily miseries had been a certain injured, irritable sense of social difference between herself and her companions. Some proportion of the girls at Cliff House were drawn from the tradesman class of two or three neighbouring towns. Their tradesmen papas were sometimes ready to deal on favourable terms with Miss Frederick for the supply of her establishment; in which case the young ladies concerned evidently felt themselves very much at home, and occasionally gave themselves airs which alternately mystified and enraged a little spitfire outsider like Marcella Boyce. Even at ten years old she perfectly understood that she was one of the Boyces of Brookshire, and that her great-uncle had been a famous Speaker of the House of Commons. The portrait of this great-uncle had hung in the dining room of that pretty London house which now seemed so far away; her father had again

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and again pointed it out to the child, and taught her to be proud of it; and more than once her childish eye had been caught by the likeness between it and an old grey-haired gentleman who occasionally came to see them, and whom she called "Grandpapa." Through one influence and another she had drawn the glory of it, and the dignity of her race generally, into her childish blood. There they were now — the glory and the dignity — a feverish leaven, driving her perpetually into the most crude and ridiculous outbreaks, which could lead to nothing but humiliation.

"I wish my great-uncle were here! *He'd* make you remember — you great — you great — big bully you!" — she shrieked on one occasion when she had been defying a big girl in authority, and the big girl — the stout and comely daughter of a local ironmonger — had been successfully asserting herself.

The big girl opened her eyes wide and laughed.

"*Your* great-uncle! Upon my word! And who may he be, miss? If it comes to that, I'd like to show *my* great-uncle David how you've scratched my wrist. He'd give it you. He's almost as strong as father, though he is so old. You get along with you, and behave yourself, and don't talk stuff to me."

Whereupon Marcella, choking with rage and tears, found herself pushed out of the schoolroom and the door shut upon her. She rushed up to the top terrace, which was the school playground, and sat there in a hidden niche of the wall, shaking and crying, — now planning vengeance on her conqueror, and now hot all over with the recollection of her own ill-bred and impotent folly.

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No — during those first two years the only pleasures, so memory declared, were three: the visits of the cake-woman on Saturday — Marcella sitting in her window could still taste the three-cornered puffs and small sweet pears on which, as much from a fierce sense of freedom and self-assertion as anything else, she had lavished her tiny weekly allowance; the mad games of "tig," which she led and organised in the top playground; and the kindnesses of fat Mademoiselle Rénier, Miss Frederick's partner, who saw a likeness in Marcella to a long-dead small sister of her own, and surreptitiously indulged "the little wild-cat," as the school generally dubbed the Speaker's great-niece, whenever she could.

But with the third year fresh elements and interests had entered in. Romance awoke, and with it certain sentimental affections. In the first place, a taste for reading had rooted itself — reading of the adventurous and poetical kind. There were two or three books which Marcella had absorbed in a way it now made her envious to remember. For at twenty-one people who take interest in many things, and are in a hurry to have opinions, must skim and "turn over" books rather than read them, must use indeed as best they may a scattered and distracted mind, and suffer occasional pangs of conscience as pretenders. But at thirteen — what concentration! what devotion! what joy! One of these precious volumes was Bulwer's "Rienzi"; another was Miss Porter's "Scottish Chiefs"; a third was a little red volume of "Marmion" which an aunt had given her. She probably never read any of them through — she had not a

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particle of industry or method in her composition — but she lived in them. The parts which it bored her to read she easily invented for herself, but the scenes and passages which thrilled her she knew by heart; she had no gift for verse-making, but she laboriously wrote a long poem on the death of Rienzi, and she tried again and again with a not inapt hand to illustrate for herself in pen and ink the execution of Wallace.

But all these loves for things and ideas were soon as nothing in comparison with a friendship, and an adoration.

To take the adoration first. When Marcella came to Cliff House she was recommended by the same relation who gave her "Marmion" to the kind offices of the clergyman of the parish, who happened to be known to some of the Boyce family. He and his wife — they had no children — did their duty amply by the odd undisciplined child. They asked her to tea once or twice; they invited her to the school-treat, where she was only self-conscious and miserably shy; and Mr. Ellerton had at least one friendly and pastoral talk with Miss Frederick as to the difficulties of her pupil's character. For a long time little came of it. Marcella was hard to tame, and when she went to tea at the Rectory Mrs. Ellerton, who was refined and sensible, did not know what to make of her, though in some unaccountable way she was drawn to and interested by the child. But with the expansion of her thirteenth year there suddenly developed in Marcie's stormy breast an overmastering absorbing passion for these two persons. She did not show it to them

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much, but for herself it raised her to another plane of existence, gave her new objects and new standards. She who had hated going to church now counted time entirely by Sundays. To see the pulpit occupied by any other form and face than those of the rector was a calamity hardly to be borne; if the exit of the school party were delayed by any accident so that Mr. and Mrs. Ellerton overtook them in the churchyard, Marcella would walk home on air, quivering with a passionate delight, and in the dreary afternoon of the school Sunday she would spend her time happily in trying to write down the heads of Mr. Ellerton's sermon. In the natural course of things she would, at this time, have taken no interest in such things at all, but whatever had been spoken by him had grace, thrill, meaning.

Nor was the week quite barren of similar delights. She was generally sent to practise on an old square piano in one of the top rooms. The window in front of her overlooked the long white drive and the distant high road into which it ran. Three times a week on an average Mrs. Ellerton's pony carriage might be expected to pass along that road. Every day Marcella watched for it, alive with expectation, her fingers strumming as they pleased. Then with the first gleam of the white pony in the distance, over would go the music stool, and the child leapt to the window, remaining fixed there, breathing quick and eagerly till the trees on the left had hidden from her the graceful erect figure of Mrs. Ellerton. Then her moment of Paradise was over; but the afterglow of it lasted for the day.

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So much for romance, for feelings as much like love as childhood can know them, full of kindling charm and mystery. Her friendship had been of course different, but it also left deep mark. A tall, consumptive girl among the Cliff House pupils, the motherless daughter of a clergyman-friend of Miss Frederick's, had for some time taken notice of Marcella, and at length won her by nothing else, in the first instance, than a remarkable gift for story-telling. She was a parlour-boarder, had a room to herself, and a fire in it when the weather was cold. She was not held strictly to lesson hours; many delicacies in the way of food were provided for her, and Miss Frederick watched over her with a quite maternal solicitude. When winter came she developed a troublesome cough, and the doctor recommended that a little suite of rooms looking south and leading out on the middle terrace of the garden should be given up to her. There was a bedroom, an intermediate dressing-room, and then a little sitting-room built out upon the terrace, with a window-door opening upon it.

Here Mary Lant spent week after week. Whenever lesson hours were done she clamoured for Marcie Boyce, and Marcella was always eager to go to her. She would fly up stairs and passages, knock at the bedroom door, run down the steps to the queer little dressing-room where the roof nearly came on your head, and down more steps again to the sitting-room. Then when the door was shut, and she was crooning over the fire with her friend, she was entirely happy. The tiny room was built on the edge of the terrace, the ground fell rapidly below it, and the west window

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commanded a broad expanse of tame arable country, of square fields and hedges, and scattered wood. Marcella, looking back upon that room, seemed always to see it flooded with the rays of wintry sunset, a kettle boiling on the fire, her pale friend in a shawl crouching over the warmth, and the branches of a snowberry tree, driven by the wind, beating against the terrace door.

But what a story-teller was Mary Lant! She was the inventor of a story called "John and Julia," which went on for weeks and months without ever producing the smallest satiety in Marcella. Unlike her books of adventure, this was a domestic drama of the purest sort; it was extremely moral and evangelical, designed indeed by its sensitively religious author for Marcie's correction and improvement. There was in it a sublime hero, who set everybody's faults to rights and lectured the heroine. In real life Marcella would probably before long have been found trying to kick his shins — a mode of warfare of which in her demon moods she was past mistress. But as Mary Lant described him, she not only bore with and trembled before him — she adored him. The taste for him and his like, as well as for the story-teller herself — a girl of a tremulous, melancholy fibre, sweet-natured, possessed by a Calvinist faith, and already prescient of death — grew upon her. Soon her absorbing desire was to be altogether shut up with Mary, except on Sundays and at practising times. For this purpose she gave herself the worst cold she could achieve, and cherished diligently what she proudly considered to be a racking cough. But Miss Frederick was deaf

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to the latter, and only threatened the usual upstairs seclusion and senna-tea for the former, whereupon Marcella in alarm declared that her cold was much better and gave up the cough in despair. It was her first sorrow and cost her some days of pale brooding and silence, and some nights of stifled tears, when during an Easter holiday a letter from Miss Frederick to her mother announced the sudden death of Mary Lant.

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CHAPTER II.

Friendship and love are humanising things, and by her fourteenth year Marcella was no longer a clever little imp, but a fast-maturing and in some ways remarkable girl, with much of the woman in her already. She had begun even to feel an interest in her dress, to speculate occasionally on her appearance. At the fourth breaking-up party after her arrival at Cliff House, Marcella, who had usually figured on these occasions in a linsey-woolsey high to the throat, amid the frilled and sashed splendours of her companions, found lying on her bed, when she went up with the others to dress, a plain white muslin dress with blue ribbons. It was the gift of old Mademoiselle Rénier, who affectionately wished her queer, neglected favourite to look well. Marcella examined it and fingered it with an excited mixture of feelings. First of all there was the sore and swelling bitterness that she should owe such things to the kindness of the French governess, whereas finery for the occasion had been freely sent to all the other girls from "home." She very nearly turned her back upon the bed and its pretty burden. But then the mere snowy whiteness of the muslin and freshness of the ribbons, and the burning curiosity to see herself decked therein, overcame a nature which, in the midst of its penury, had been

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always really possessed by a more than common hunger for sensuous beauty and seemliness. Marcella wore it, was stormily happy in it, and kissed Mademoiselle Rénier for it at night with an effusion, nay, some tears, which no one at Cliff House had ever witnessed in her before except with the accompaniments of rage and fury.

A little later her father came to see her, the first and only visit he paid to her at school. Marcella, to whom he was by now almost a stranger, received him demurely, making no confidences, and took him over the house and gardens. When he was about to leave her a sudden upswell of paternal sentiment made him ask her if she was happy and if she wanted anything.

"Yes!" said Marcella, her large eyes gleaming; "tell mamma I want a 'fringe.' Every other girl in the school has got one."

And she pointed disdainfully to her plainly parted hair. Her father, astonished by her unexpected vehemence, put up his eyeglass and studied the child's appearance. Three days later, by her mother's permission, Marcella was taken to the hairdresser at Marswell by Mademoiselle Rénier, returned in all the glories of a "fringe," and, in acknowledgment thereof, wrote her mother a letter which for the first time had something else than formal news in it.

Meanwhile new destinies were preparing for her. For a variety of small reasons Mr. Boyce, who had never yet troubled himself about the matter from a distance, was not, upon personal inspection, very favourably struck with his daughter's surroundings. His wife remarked shortly, when he complained to

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her, that Marcella seemed to her as well off as the daughter of persons of their means could expect to be. But Mr. Boyce stuck to his point. He had just learnt that Harold, the only son of his widowed brother Robert, of Mellor Park, had recently developed a deadly disease, which might be long, but must in the end be sure. If the young man died and he outlived Robert, Mellor Park would be his; they would and must return, in spite of certain obstacles, to their natural rank in society, and Marcella must of course be produced as his daughter and heiress. When his wife repulsed him, he went to his eldest sister, an old maid with a small income of her own, who happened to be staying with them, and was the only member of his family with whom he was now on terms. She was struck with his remarks, which bore on family pride, a commodity not always to be reckoned on in the Boyces, but which she herself possessed in abundance; and when he paused she slowly said that if an ideal school of another type could be found for Marcella, she would be responsible for what it might cost over and above the present arrangement. Marcella's manners were certainly rough; it was difficult to say what she was learning, or with whom she was associating; accomplishments she appeared to have none. Something should certainly be done for her — considering the family contingencies. But being a strong evangelical, the aunt stipulated for "religious influences," and said she would write to a friend.

The result was that a month or two later Marcella, now close on her fourteenth birthday, was transferred from Cliff House to the charge of a lady who man-

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aged a small but much-sought-after school for young ladies at Solesby, a watering place on the east coast.

But when in the course of reminiscence Marcella found herself once more at Solesby, memory began to halt and wander, to choose another tone and method. At Solesby the rough surroundings and primitive teaching of Cliff House, together with her own burning sense of inferiority and disadvantage, had troubled her no more. She was well taught there, and developed quickly from the troublesome child into the young lady duly broken in to all social proprieties. But it was not her lessons or her dancing masters that she remembered. She had made for herself agitations at Cliff House, but what were they as compared to the agitations of Solesby! Life there had been one long Wertherish romance in which there were few incidents, only feelings, which were themselves events. It contained humiliations and pleasures, but they had been all matters of spiritual relation, connected with one figure only — the figure of her schoolmistress, Miss Pemberton; and with one emotion only — a passion, an adoration, akin to that she had lavished on the Ellertons, but now much more expressive and mature. A tall slender woman with brown, grey-besprinkled hair falling in light curls after the fashion of our grandmothers on either cheek, and braided into a classic knot behind — the face of a saint, an enthusiast — eyes overflowing with feeling above a thin firm mouth — the mouth of the obstinate saint, yet sweet also: this delicate significant picture was stamped on Marcella's heart. What tremors of fear and joy could she not

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remember in connection with it? what night-vigils when a tired girl kept herself through long hours awake that she might see at last the door open and a figure with a night-lamp standing an instant in the doorway? — for Miss Pemberton, who slept little and read late, never went to rest without softly going the rounds of her pupils' rooms. What storms of contest, mainly provoked by Marcella for the sake of the emotions, first of combat, then of reconciliation to which they led! What a strange development on the pupil's side of a certain histrionic gift, a turn for imaginative intrigue, for endless small contrivances such as might rouse or heighten the recurrent excitements of feeling! What agitated moments of religious talk! What golden days in the holidays, when long-looked-for letters arrived full of religious admonition, letters which were carried about and wept over till they fell to pieces under the stress of such a worship — what terrors and agonies of a stimulated conscience — what remorse for sins committed at school — what zeal to confess them in letters of a passionate eloquence — and what indifference meanwhile to anything of the same sort that might have happened at home!

Strange faculty that women have for thus lavishing their heart's blood from their very cradles! Marcella could hardly look back now, in the quiet of thought, to her five years with Miss Pemberton without a shiver of agitation. Yet now she never saw her. It was two years since they parted; the school was broken up; her idol had gone to India to join a widowed brother. It was all over — for ever. Those

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precious letters had worn themselves away; so, too, had Marcella's religious feelings; she was once more another being.

But these two years since she had said good-bye to Solesby and her school days? Once set thinking of bygones by the stimulus of Mellor and its novelty, Marcella must needs think, too, of her London life, of all that it had opened to her, and meant for her. Fresh agitations! — fresh passions! — but this time impersonal, passions of the mind and sympathies.

At the time she left Solesby her father and mother were abroad, and it was apparently not convenient that she should join them. Marcella, looking back, could not remember that she had ever been much desired at home. No doubt she had been often moody and tiresome in the holidays; but she suspected — nay, was certain — that there had been other and more permanent reasons why her parents felt her presence with them a burden. At any rate, when the moment came for her to leave Miss Pemberton, her mother wrote from abroad that, as Marcella had of late shown decided aptitude both for music and painting, it would be well that she should cultivate both gifts for a while more seriously than would be possible at home. Mrs. Boyce had made inquiries, and was quite willing that her daughter should go, for a time, to a lady whose address she enclosed, and to whom she herself had written — a lady who received girl-students working at the South Kensington art classes.

So began an experience, as novel as it was strenuous. Marcella soon developed all the airs of inde-

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pendence and all the jargon of two professions. Working with consuming energy and ambition, she pushed her gifts so far as to become at least a very intelligent, eager, and confident critic of the art of other people—which is much. But though art stirred and trained her, gave her new horizons and new standards, it was not in art that she found ultimately the chief excitement and motive-power of her new life—not in art, but in the birth of social and philanthropic ardour, the sense of a hitherto unsuspected social power.

One of her girl-friends and fellow-students had two brothers in London, both at work at South Kensington, and living not far from their sister. The three were orphans. They sprang from a nervous, artistic stock, and Marcella had never before come near any one capable of crowding so much living into the twenty-four hours. The two brothers, both of them skilful and artistic designers in different lines, and hard at work all day, were members of a rising Socialist society, and spent their evenings almost entirely on various forms of social effort and Socialist propaganda. They seemed to Marcella's young eyes absolutely sincere and quite unworldly. They lived as workmen; and both the luxuries and the charities of the rich were equally odious to them. That there could be any "right" in private property or private wealth had become incredible to them; their minds were full of lurid images or resentments drawn from the existing state of London; and though one was humorous and handsome, the other, short, sickly, and pedantic, neither could discuss the Socialist ideal with-

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out passion, nor hear it attacked without anger. And in milder measure their sister, who possessed more artistic gift than either of them, was like unto them.

Marcella saw much of these three persons, and something of their friends. She went with them to Socialist lectures, or to the public evenings of the Venturist Society, to which the brothers belonged. Edie, the sister, assaulted the imagination of her friend, made her read the books of a certain eminent poet and artist, once the poet of love and dreamland, "the idle singer of an empty day," now seer and prophet, the herald of an age to come, in which none shall possess, though all shall enjoy. The brothers, more ambitious, attacked her through the reason, brought her popular translations and selections from Marx and Lassalle, together with each Venturist pamphlet and essay as it appeared; they flattered her with technical talk; they were full of the importance of women to the new doctrine and the new era.

The handsome brother was certainly in love with her; the other, probably. Marcella was not in love with either of them, but she was deeply interested in all three, and for the sickly brother she felt at that time a profound admiration — nay, reverence — which influenced her vitally at a critical moment of life. "Blessed are the poor" — "Woe unto you, rich men" — these were the only articles of his scanty creed, but they were held with a fervour, and acted upon with a conviction, which our modern religion seldom commands. His influence made Marcella a rent-collector under a lady friend of his in the East End; because of it, she worked herself beyond her strength in a

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joint attempt made by some members of the Venturist Society to organise a Tailoresses' Union; and, to please him, she read articles and blue-books on Sweating and Overcrowding. It was all very moving and very dramatic; so, too, was the persuasion Marcella divined in her friends, that she was destined in time, with work and experience, to great things and high place in the movement.

The wholly unexpected news of Mr. Boyce's accession to Mellor had very various effects upon this little band of comrades. It revived in Marcella ambitions, instincts and tastes wholly different from those of her companions, but natural to her by temperament and inheritance. The elder brother, Anthony Craven, always melancholy and suspicious, divined her immediately.

"How glad you are to be done with Bohemia!" he said to her ironically one day, when he had just discovered her with the photographs of Mellor about her. "And how rapidly it works!"

"What works?" she asked him angrily.

"The poison of possession. And what a mean end it puts to things! A week ago you were all given to causes not your own; now, how long will it take you to think of us as 'poor fanatics!'—and to be ashamed you ever knew us?"

"You mean to say that I am a mean hypocrite!" she cried. "Do you think that because I delight in—in pretty things and old associations, I must give up all my convictions? Shall I find no poor at Mellor—no work to do? It is unkind—unfair. It is the way all reform breaks down—through mutual distrust!"

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He looked at her with a cold smile in his dark, sunken eyes, and she turned from him indignantly.

When they bade her good-bye at the station, she begged them to write to her.

"No, no!" said Louis, the handsome younger brother. "If ever you want us, we are there. If you write, we will answer. But you won't need to think about us yet awhile. Good-bye!"

And he pressed her hand with a smile.

The good fellow had put all his own dreams and hopes out of sight with a firm hand since the arrival of her great news. Indeed, Marcella realised in them all that she was renounced. Louis and Edith spoke with affection and regret. As to Anthony, from the moment that he set eyes upon the maid sent to escort her to Mellor, and the first-class ticket that had been purchased for her, Marcella perfectly understood that she had become to him as an enemy.

"They shall see — I will show them!" she said to herself with angry energy, as the train whirled her away. And her sense of their unwarrantable injustice kept her tense and silent till she was roused to a childish and passionate pleasure by a first sight of the wide lawns and time-stained front of Mellor.

Of such elements, such memories of persons, things, and events, was Marcella's reverie by the window made up. One thing, however, which, clearly, this report of it has not explained, is that spirit of energetic discontent with her past in which she had entered on her musings. Why such soreness of spirit? Her childhood had been pinched and loveless; but,

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after all, it could well bear comparison with that of many another child of impoverished parents. There had been compensations all through — and were not the great passion of her Solesby days, together with the interest and novelty of her London experience, enough to give zest and glow to the whole retrospect?

Ah! but it will be observed that in this sketch of Marcella's schooldays nothing has been said of Marcella's holidays. In this omission the narrative has but followed the hasty, half-conscious gaps and slurs of the girl's own thought. For Marcella never thought of those holidays and all that was connected with them *in detail*, if she could possibly avoid it. But it was with them, in truth, and with what they implied, that she was so irritably anxious to be done when she first began to be reflective by the window; and it was to them she returned with vague, but still intense consciousness when the rush of active reminiscence died away.

That surely was the breakfast bell ringing, and with the dignified ancestral sound which was still so novel and attractive to Marcella's ear. Recalled to Mellor Park and its circumstances, she went thoughtfully downstairs, pondering a little on the shallow steps of the beautiful Jacobean staircase. *Could* she ever turn her back upon those holidays? Was she not rather, so to speak, just embarked upon their sequel, or second volume?

But let us go downstairs also.

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CHAPTER III.

BREAKFAST was laid in the "Chinese room," a room which formed part of the stately "garden front," added to the original structure of the house in the eighteenth century by a Boyce whose wife had money. The decorations, especially of the domed and vaulted roof, were supposed by their eighteenth century designer to be "Oriental"; they were, at any rate, intricate and overladen; and the figures of mandarins on the worn and discoloured wall-paper had, at least, top-knots, pigtails, and petticoats to distinguish them from the ordinary Englishmen of 1760, besides a charming mellowness of colour and general effect bestowed on them by time and dilapidation. The marble mantelpiece was elaborately carved in Chinamen and pagodas. There were Chinese curiosities of a miscellaneous kind on the tables, and the beautiful remains of an Indian carpet underfoot. Unluckily, some later Boyce had thrust a crudely Gothic sideboard, with an arched and pillared front, adapted to the purposes of a warming apparatus, into the midst of the mandarins, which disturbed the general effect. But with all its original absurdities, and its modern defacements, the room was a beautiful and stately one. Marcella stepped into it with a slight unconscious straightening of her tall form. It seemed to her that she had never breathed

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easily till now, in the ample space of these rooms and gardens.

Her father and mother were already at table, together with Mrs. Boyce's brown spaniel Lynn.

Mr. Boyce was employed in ordering about the tall boy in a worn and greasy livery coat, who represented the men-service of the establishment; his wife was talking to her dog, but from the lift of her eyebrows, and the twitching of her thin lips, it was plain to Marcella that her mother was as usual of opinion that her father was behaving foolishly.

"There, for goodness' sake, cut some bread on the sideboard," said the angry master, "and hand it round instead of staring about you like a stuck pig. What they taught you at Sir William Jute's I can't conceive. *I* didn't undertake to make a man-servant of you, sir."

The pale, harassed lad flew at the bread, cut it with a vast scattering of crumbs, handed it clumsily round, and then took glad advantage of a short supply of coffee to bolt from the room to order more.

"Idiot!" said Mr. Boyce, with an angry frown, as he disappeared.

"If you would allow Ann to do her proper parlour work again," said his wife blandly, "you would, I think, be less annoyed. And as I believe William was boot boy at the Jutes', it is not surprising that he did not learn waiting."

"I tell you, Evelyn, that our position *demands* a man-servant!" was the hot reply. "None of my family have ever attempted to run this house with women only. It would be unseemly — unfitting — incon —"

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"Oh, I am no judge of course of what a Boyce may do!" said his wife carelessly. "I leave that to you and the neighbourhood."

Mr. Boyce looked uncomfortable, cooled down, and presently when the coffee came back asked his wife for a fresh supply in tones from which all bellicosity had for the time departed. He was a small and singularly thin man, with blue wandering eyes under the blackest possible eyebrows and hair. The cheeks were hollow, the complexion as yellow as that of the typical Anglo-Indian. The special character of the mouth was hidden by a fine black moustache, but his prevailing expression varied between irritability and a kind of plaintiveness. The conspicuous blue eyes were as a rule melancholy; but they could be childishly bright and self-assertive. There was a general air of breeding about Richard Boyce, of that air at any rate which our common generalisations connect with the pride of old family; his dress was careful and correct to the last detail; and his hands with their long fingers were of an excessive delicacy, though marred as to beauty by a thinness which nearly amounted to emaciation.

"The servants say they must leave unless the ghost does, Marcella," said Mrs. Boyce, suddenly, laying a morsel of toast as she spoke on Lynn's nose. "Someone from the village of course has been talking — the cook says she heard *something* last night, though she will not condescend to particulars — and in general it seems to me that you and I may be left before long to do the house work."

"What do they say in the village?" asked Marcella eagerly.

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"Oh! they say there was a Boyce two hundred years ago who fled down here from London after doing something he shouldn't — I really forget what. The sheriff's officers were advancing on the house. Their approach displeased him, and he put an end to himself at the head of the little staircase leading from the tapestry-room down to my sitting-room. Why did he choose the *staircase?*" said Mrs. Boyce with light reflectiveness.

"It won't do," said Marcella, shaking her head. "I know the Boyce they mean. He was a ruffian, but he shot himself in London; and, any way, he was dead long before that staircase was built."

"Dear me, how well up you are!" said her mother. "Suppose you give a little lecture on the family in the servants' hall. Though I never knew a ghost yet that was undone by dates."

There was a satiric detachment in her tone which contrasted sharply with Marcella's amused but sympathetic interest. *Detachment* was perhaps the characteristic note of Mrs. Boyce's manner, — a curious separateness, as it were, from all the things and human beings immediately about her.

Marcella pondered.

"I shall ask Mr. Harden about the stories," she said presently. "He will have heard them in the village. I am going to the church this morning."

Her mother looked at her — a look of quiet examination — and smiled. The Lady Bountiful airs that Marcella had already assumed during the six weeks she had been in the house entertained Mrs. Boyce exceedingly.

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"Harden!" said Mr. Boyce, catching the name. "I wish that man would leave me alone. What have I got to do with a water-supply for the village? It will be as much as ever I can manage to keep a water-tight roof over our heads during the winter after the way in which Robert has behaved."

Marcella's cheek flushed.

"The village water-supply is a *disgrace*," she said with low emphasis. "I never saw such a crew of unhealthy, wretched-looking children in my life as swarm about those cottages. We take the rent, and we ought to look after them. I believe you could be *forced* to do something, papa — if the local authority were of any use."

She looked at him defiantly.

"Nonsense," said Mr. Boyce testily. "They got along in your Uncle Robert's days, and they can get along now. Charity, indeed! Why, the state of this house and the pinch for money altogether is enough, I should think, to take a man's mind. Don't you go talking to Mr. Harden in the way you do, Marcella. I don't like it, and I won't have it. You have the interests of your family and your home to think of first."

"Poor starved things!" said Marcella sarcastically — "living in such a *den!*"

And she swept her white hand round, as though calling to witness the room in which they sat.

"I tell you," said Mr. Boyce, rising and standing before the fire, whence he angrily surveyed the handsome daughter who was in truth so little known to him, and whose nature and aims during the close con-

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tact of the last few weeks had become something of a perplexity and disturbance to him,—"I tell you our great effort, the effort of us all, must be to keep up the family position!—*our* position. Look at that library, and its condition; look at the state of these wall-papers; look at the garden; look at the estate books if it comes to that. Why, it will be years before, even with all my knowledge of affairs, I can pull the thing through—years!"

Mrs. Boyce gave a slight cough—she had pushed back her chair, and was alternately studying her husband and daughter. They might have been actors performing for her amusement. And yet, amusement is not precisely the word. For that hazel eye, with its frequent smile, had not a spark of geniality. After a time those about her found something scathing in its dry light.

Now, as soon as her husband became aware that she was watching him, his look wavered, and his mood collapsed. He threw her a curious furtive glance, and fell silent.

"I suppose Mr. Harden and his sister remind you of your London Socialist friends, Marcella?" asked Mrs. Boyce lightly, in the pause that followed. "You have, I see, taken a great liking for them."

"Oh! well—I don't know," said Marcella, with a shrug, and something of a proud reticence. "Mr. Harden is very kind—but—he doesn't seem to have thought much about things."

She never talked about her London friends to her mother, if she could help it. The sentiments of life generally avoided Mrs. Boyce when they could. Mar-

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cella being all sentiment and impulse, was constantly her mother's victim, do what she would. But in her quiet moments she stood on the defensive.

"So the Socialists are the only people who think?" said Mrs. Boyce, who was now standing by the window, pressing her dog's head against her dress as he pushed up against her. "Well, I am sorry for the Hardens. They tell me they give all their substance away — already — and every one says it is going to be a particularly bad winter. The living, I hear, is worth nothing. All the same, I should wish them to look more cheerful. It is the first duty of martyrs."

Marcella looked at her mother indignantly. It seemed to her often that she said the most heartless things imaginable.

"Cheerful!" she said — "in a village like this — with all the young men drifting off to London, and all the well-to-do people dissenters — no one to stand by him — no money and no helpers — the people always ill — wages eleven and twelve shillings a week — and only the old wrecks of men left to do the work! He might, I think, expect the people in *this* house to back him up a little. All he asks is that papa should go and satisfy himself with his own eyes as to the difference between our property and Lord Maxwell's —"

"Lord Maxwell's!" cried Mr. Boyce, rousing himself from a state of half-melancholy, half-sleepy reverie by the fire, and throwing away his cigarette — "Lord Maxwell! Difference! I should think so. Thirty thousand a year, if he has a penny. By the way, I wish he would just have the civility to answer

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my note about those coverts over by Willow Scrubs!"

He had hardly said the words when the door opened to admit William the footman, in his usual tremor of nervousness, carrying a salver and a note.

"The man says, please sir, is there any answer, sir?"

"Well, that's odd!" said Mr. Boyce, his look brightening. "Here *is* Lord Maxwell's answer, just as I was talking of it."

His wife turned sharply and watched him take it; her lips parted, a strange expectancy in her whole attitude. He tore it open, read it, and then threw it angrily under the grate.

"No answer. Shut the door." The lad retreated. Mr. Boyce sat down and began carefully to put the fire together. His thin left hand shook upon his knee.

There was a moment's pause of complete silence. Mrs. Boyce's face might have been seen by a close observer to quiver and then stiffen as she stood in the light of the window, a tall and queenly figure in her sweeping black. But she said not a word, and presently left the room.

Marcella watched her father.

"Papa — *was* that a note from Lord Maxwell?"

Mr. Boyce looked round with a start, as though surprised that any one was still there. It struck Marcella that he looked yellow and shrunken — years older than her mother. An impulse of tenderness, joined with anger and a sudden sick depression — she was conscious of them all as she got up and went across to

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him, determined to speak out. Her parents were not her friends, and did not possess her confidence; but her constant separation from them since her childhood had now sometimes the result of giving her the boldness with them that a stranger might have had. She had no habitual deference to break through, and the hindering restraints of memory, though strong, were still less strong than they would have been if she had lived with them day by day and year by year, and had known their lives in close detail instead of guessing at them, as was now so often the case with her.

"Papa, is Lord Maxwell's note an uncivil one?"

Mr. Boyce stooped forward and began to rub his chilly hand over the blaze.

"Why, that man's only son and I used to loaf and shoot and play cricket together from morning till night when we were boys. Henry Raeburn was a bit older than I, and he lent me the gun with which I shot my first rabbit. It was in one of the fields over by Soleyhurst, just where the two estates join. After that we were always companions — we used to go out at night with the keepers after poachers; we spent hours in the snow watching for wood-pigeons; we shot that pair of kestrels over the inner hall door, in the Windmill Hill fields — at least I did — I was a better shot than he by that time. He didn't like Robert — he always wanted me."

"Well, papa, but what does he say?" asked Marcella, impatiently. She laid her hand, however, as she spoke, on her father's shoulder.

Mr. Boyce winced and looked up at her. He and her mother had originally sent their daughter away

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from home that they might avoid the daily worry of her awakening curiosities, and one of his resolutions in coming to Mellor Park had been to keep up his dignity with her. But the sight of her dark face bent upon him, softened by a quick and womanly compassion, seemed to set free a new impulse in him.

"He writes in the third person, if you want to know, my dear, and refers me to his agent, very much as though I were some London grocer who had just bought the place. Oh, it is quite evident what he means. They were here without moving all through June and July, and it is now three weeks at least since he and Miss Raeburn came back from Scotland, and not a card nor a word from either of them! Nor from the Winterbournes, nor the Levens. Pleasant! Well, my dear, you must make up your mind to it. I did think — I was fool enough to think — that when I came back to the old place, my father's old friends would let bygones be bygones. I never did *them* any harm. Let them 'gang their gait,' confound them!" — the little dark man straightened himself fiercely — "I can get my pleasure out of the land; and as for your mother, she'd not lift a finger to propitiate one of them!"

In the last words, however, there was not a fraction of that sympathetic pride which the ear expected, but rather fresh bitterness and grievance.

Marcella stood thinking, her mind travelling hither and thither with lightning speed, now over the social events of the last six weeks — now over incidents of those long-past holidays. Was this, indeed, the second volume beginning — the natural sequel to those old

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mysterious histories of shrinking, disillusion, and repulse?

"What was it you wanted about those coverts, papa?" she asked presently, with a quick decision.

"What the deuce does it matter? If you want to know, I proposed to him to exchange my coverts over by the Scrubs, which work in with his shooting, for the wood down by the Home Farm. It was an exchange made year after year in my father's time. When I spoke to the keeper, I found it had been allowed to lapse. Your uncle let the shooting go to rack and ruin after Harold's death. It gave me something to write about, and I was determined to know where I stood — Well! the old Pharisee can go his way: I'll go mine."

And with a spasmodic attempt to play the squire of Mellor on his native heath, Richard Boyce rose, drew his emaciated frame to its full height, and stood looking out drearily to his ancestral lawns — a picturesque and elegant figure, for all its weakness and pitiableness.

"I shall ask Mr. Aldous Raeburn about it, if I see him in the village to-day," said Marcella, quietly.

Her father started, and looked at her with some attention.

"What have you seen of Aldous Raeburn?" he inquired. "I remember hearing that you had come across him."

"Certainly I have come across him. I have met him once or twice at the Vicarage — and — oh! on one or two other occasions," said Marcella, carelessly. "He has always made himself agreeable. Mr. Har-

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den says his grandfather is devoted to him, and will hardly ever let him go away from home. He does a great deal for Lord Maxwell now: writes for him, and helps to manage the estate; and next year, when the Tories come back and Lord Maxwell is in office again —"

"Why, of course, there'll be plums for the grandson," said Mr. Boyce with a sneer. "That goes without saying — though we are such a virtuous lot."

"Oh yes, he'll get on — everybody says so. And he'll deserve it too!" she added, her eye kindling combatively as she surveyed her father. "He takes a lot of trouble down here about the cottages and the board of guardians and the farms. The Hardens like him very much, but he is not exactly popular, according to them. His manners are sometimes shy and awkward, and the poor people think he's proud."

"Ah! a prig I dare say — like some of his uncles before him," said Mr. Boyce, irritably. "But he was civil to you, you say?"

And again he turned a quick considering eye on his daughter.

"Oh dear! yes," said Marcella, with a little proud smile. There was a pause; then she spoke again. "I must go off to the church; the Hardens have hard work just now with the harvest festival, and I promised to take them some flowers."

"Well" — said her father, grudgingly, "so long as you don't promise anything on my account! I tell you, I haven't got sixpence to spend on subscriptions to anything or anybody. By the way, if you see Reynolds anywhere about the drive, you can send him to

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me. He and I are going round the Home Farm to pick up a few birds if we can, and see what the coverts look like. The stock has all run down, and the place has been poached to death. But he thinks if we take on an extra man in the spring, and spend a little on rearing, we shall do pretty decently next year."

The colour leapt to Marcella's cheek as she tied on her hat.

"You will set up another keeper, and you won't do anything for the village?" she cried, her black eyes lightening, and without another word she opened the French window and walked rapidly away along the terrace, leaving her father both angered and amazed.

A man like Richard Boyce cannot get comfortably through life without a good deal of masquerading in which those in his immediate neighbourhood are expected to join. His wife had long since consented to play the game, on condition of making it plain the whole time that she was no dupe. As to what Marcella's part in the affair might be going to be, her father was as yet uneasily in the dark. What constantly astonished him, as she moved and talked under his eye, was the girl's beauty. Surely she had been a plain child, though a striking one. But now she had not only beauty, but the air of beauty. The self-confidence given by the possession of good looks was very evident in her behaviour. She was very accomplished, too, and more clever than was always quite agreeable to a father whose self-conceit was one of the few compensations left him by misfortune. Such a girl was sure to be admired. She would have lovers —

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friends of her own. It seemed that already, while Lord Maxwell was preparing to insult the father, his grandson had discovered that the daughter was handsome. Richard Boyce fell into a miserable reverie, wherein the Raeburns' behaviour and Marcella's unexpected gifts played about equal parts.

Meanwhile Marcella was gathering flowers in the "Cedar garden," the most adorable corner of Mellor Park, where the original Tudor house, grey, mullioned and ivy-covered, ran at right angles into the later "garden front," which projected beyond it to the south, making thereby a sunny and sheltered corner where roses, clematis, hollyhocks, and sunflowers grew with a more lavish height and blossom than elsewhere, as though conscious they must do their part in a whole of beauty. The grass indeed wanted mowing, and the first autumn leaves lay thickly drifted upon it; the flowers were untied and untrimmed. But under the condition of two gardeners to ten acres of garden, nature does very much as she pleases, and Mr. Boyce when he came that way grumbled in vain.

As for Marcella, she was alternately moved to revolt and tenderness by the ragged charm of the old place.

On the one hand, it angered her that anything so plainly meant for beauty and dignity should go so neglected and unkempt. On the other, if house and gardens had been spick and span like the other houses of the neigbourhood, if there had been sound roofs, a modern water-supply, shutters, greenhouses, and weedless paths, — in short, the general self-complacent air of a well-kept country house, — where would have been

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that thrilling intimate appeal, as for something forlornly lovely, which the old place so constantly made upon her? It seemed to depend even upon *her*, the latest born of all its children — to ask for tendance and cherishing even from *her*. She was always planning how — with a minimum of money to spend — it could be comforted and healed, and in the planning had grown in these few weeks to love it as though she had been bred there.

But this morning Marcella picked her roses and sunflowers in tumult and depression of spirit. What *was* this past which in these new surroundings was like some vainly fled tyrant clutching at them again? She energetically decided that the time had come for her to demand the truth. Yet, of whom? Marcella knew very well that to force her mother to any line of action Mrs. Boyce was unwilling to follow, was beyond her power. And it was not easy to go to her father directly and say, "Tell me exactly how and why it is that society has turned its back upon you." All the same, it *was* due to them all, due to herself especially, now that she was grown up and at home, that she should not be kept in the dark any longer like a baby, that she should be put in possession of the facts which, after all, threatened to stand here at Mellor Park, as untowardly in their, in *her* way, as they had done in the shabby school and lodging-house existence of all those bygone years.

Perhaps the secret of her impatience was that she did not, and could not, believe that the facts, if faced, would turn out to be insurmountable. Her instinct told her as she looked back that their relation toward

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society in the past, though full of discomforts and humiliations, had not been the relation of outcasts. Their poverty and the shifts to which poverty drives people had brought them the disrespect of one class; and as to the acquaintances and friends of their own rank, what had been mainly shown them had been a sort of cool distaste for their company, an insulting readiness to forget the existence of people who had so to speak lost their social bloom, and laid themselves open to the contemptuous disapproval or pity of the world. Everybody, it seemed, knew their affairs, and knowing them saw no personal advantage and distinction in the Boyces' acquaintance, but rather the contrary.

As she put the facts together a little, she realised, however, that the breach had always been deepest between her father and his relations, or his oldest friends. A little shiver passed through her as she reflected that here, in his own country, where his history was best known, the feeling towards him, whatever it rested upon, might very probably be strongest. Well, it *was* hard upon them! — hard upon her mother — hard upon her. In her first ecstasy over the old ancestral house and the dignities of her new position, how little she had thought of these things! And there they were all the time — dogging and thwarting.

She walked slowly along, with her burden of flowers, through a laurel path which led straight to the drive, and so, across it, to the little church. The church stood all alone there under the great limes of the Park, far away from parsonage and village — the property, it seemed, of the big house. When Marcella

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entered, the doors on the north and south sides were both standing open, for the vicar and his sister had been already at work there, and had but gone back to the parsonage for a bit of necessary business, meaning to return in half an hour.

It was the unpretending church of a hamlet, girt outside by the humble graves of toiling and forgotten generations, and adorned, or, at any rate, diversified within by a group of mural monuments, of various styles and dates, but all of them bearing, in some way or another, the name of Boyce — conspicuous amongst them a florid cherub-crowned tomb in the chancel, marking the remains of that Parliamentarian Boyce who fought side by side with Hampden, his boyish friend, at Chalgrove Field, lived to be driven out of Westminster by Colonel Pryde, and to spend his later years at Mellor, in disgrace, first with the Protector, and then with the Restoration. From these monuments alone a tolerably faithful idea of the Boyce family could have been gathered. Clearly not a family of any very great pretensions — a race for the most part of frugal, upright country gentlemen — to be found, with scarcely an exception, on the side of political liberty, and of a Whiggish religion; men who had given their sons to die at Quebec, and Plassy, and Trafalgar, for the making of England's Empire; who would have voted with Fox, but that the terrors of Burke, and a dogged sense that the country must be carried on, drove them into supporting Pitt; who, at home, dispensed alternate justice and doles, and when their wives died put up inscriptions to them intended to bear witness at once to the Latinity of a Boyce's

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education, and the pious strength of his legitimate affections — a tedious race perhaps and pig-headed, tyrannical too here and there, but on the whole honourable English stuff — the stuff which has made, and still in new forms sustains, the fabric of a great state.

Only once was there a break in the uniform character of the monuments — a break corresponding to the highest moment of the Boyce fortunes, a moment when the respectability of the family rose suddenly into brilliance, and the prose of generations broke into a few years of poetry. Somewhere in the last century an earlier Richard Boyce went abroad to make the grand tour. He was a man of parts, the friend of Horace Walpole and of Gray, and his introductions opened to him whatever doors he might wish to enter, at a time when the upper classes of the leading European nations were far more intimately and familiarly acquainted with each other than they are now. He married at Rome an Italian lady of high birth and large fortune. Then he brought her home to Mellor, where straightway the garden front was built with all its fantastic and beautiful decoration, the great avenue was planted, pictures began to invade the house, and a musical library was collected whereof the innumerable faded volumes, bearing each of them the entwined names of Richard and Marcella Boyce, had been during the last few weeks mines of delight and curiosity to the Marcella of to-day.

The Italian wife bore her lord two sons, and then in early middle life she died — much loved and passionately mourned. Her tomb bore no long-winded pane-

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gyric. Her name only, her parentage and birthplace — for she was Italian to the last, and her husband loved her the better for it — the dates of her birth and death, and then two lines from Dante's *Vita Nuova.*

The portrait of this earlier Marcella hung still in the room where her music-books survived, — a dark blurred picture by an inferior hand; but the Marcella of to-day had long since eagerly decided that her own physique and her father's were to be traced to its original, as well, no doubt, as the artistic aptitudes of both — aptitudes not hitherto conspicuous in her respectable race.

In reality, however, she loved every one of them — these Jacobean and Georgian squires with their interminable epitaphs. Now, as she stood in the church, looking about her, her flowers lying beside her in a tumbled heap on the chancel step, cheerfulness, delight, nay, the indomitable pride and exultation of her youth, came back upon her in one great lifting wave. The depression of her father's repentances and trepidations fell away; she felt herself in her place, under the shelter of her forefathers, incorporated and redeemed, as it were, into their guild of honour.

There were difficulties in her path, no doubt — but she had her vantage-ground, and would use it for her own profit and that of others. *She* had no cause for shame; and in these days of the developed individual the old solidarity of the family has become injustice and wrong. Her mind filled tumultuously with the evidence these last two years had brought her of her natural power over men and things. She knew perfectly well that she could do and dare what other

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girls of her age could never venture — that she had fascination, resource, brain.

Already, in these few weeks — Smiles played about her lips as she thought of that quiet grave gentleman of thirty she had been meeting at the Hardens'. His grandfather might write what he pleased. It did not alter the fact that during the last few weeks Mr. Aldous Raeburn, clearly one of the *partis* most coveted, and one of the men most observed, in the neighbourhood, had taken and shown a very marked interest in Mr. Boyce's daughter — all the more marked because of the reserved manner with which it had to contend.

No! whatever happened, she would carve her path, make her own way, and her parents' too. At twenty-one, nothing looks irrevocable. A woman's charm, a woman's energy should do it all.

Ay, and something else too. She looked quickly round the church, her mind swelling with the sense of the Cravens' injustice and distrust. Never could she be more conscious than here — on this very spot — of mission, of an urging call to the service of man. In front of her was the Boyces' family pew, carved and becushioned, but behind it stretched bench after bench of plain and humble oak, on which the village sat when it came to church. Here, for the first time, had Marcella been brought face to face with the agricultural world as it is — no stage ruralism, but the bare fact in one of its most pitiful aspects. Men of sixty and upwards, grey and furrowed like the chalk soil into which they had worked their lives; not old as age goes, but already the refuse of their generation, and paid for at the rate of refuse; with no prospect but the workhouse,

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if the grave should be delayed, yet quiet, impassive, resigned, now showing a furtive childish amusement if a schoolboy misbehaved, or a dog strayed into church, now joining with a stolid unconsciousness in the tremendous sayings of the Psalms; women coarse, or worn, or hopeless; girls and boys and young children already blanched and emaciated beyond even the normal Londoner from the effects of insanitary cottages, bad water, and starvation food — these figures and types had been a ghastly and quickening revelation to Marcella. In London the agricultural labourer, of whom she had heard much, had been to her as a pawn in the game of discussion. Here he was in the flesh; and she was called upon to live with him, and not only to talk about him. Under circumstances of peculiar responsibility too. For it was very clear that upon the owner of Mellor depended, and had always depended, the labourer of Mellor.

Well, she had tried to live with them ever since she came — had gone in and out of their cottages in flat horror and amazement at them and their lives and their surroundings; alternately pleased and repelled by their cringing; now enjoying her position among them with the natural aristocratic instinct of women, now grinding her teeth over her father's and uncle's behaviour and the little good she saw any prospect of doing for her new subjects.

What, *their* friend and champion, and ultimately their redeemer too? Well, and why not? Weak women have done greater things in the world. As she stood on the chancel step, vowing herself to these great things, she was conscious of a dramatic moment

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— would not have been sorry, perhaps, if some admiring eye could have seen and understood her.

But there was a saving sincerity at the root of her, and her strained mood sank naturally into a girlish excitement.

"We shall see! — We shall see!" she said aloud, and was startled to hear her words quite plainly in the silent church. As she spoke she stooped to separate her flowers and see what quantities she had of each.

But while she did so a sound of distant voices made her raise herself again. She walked down the church and stood at the open south door, looking and waiting. Before her stretched a green field path leading across the park to the village. The vicar and his sister were coming along it towards the church, both flower-laden, and beside walked a tall man in a brown shooting suit, with his gun in his hand and his dog beside him.

The excitement in Marcella's eyes leapt up afresh for a moment as she saw the group, and then subsided into a luminous and steady glow. She waited quietly for them, hardly responding to the affectionate signals of the vicar's sister; but inwardly she was not quiet at all. For the tall man in the brown shooting coat was Mr. Aldous Raeburn.

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CHAPTER IV.

"How kind of you!" said the rector's sister, enthusiastically; "but I thought you would come and help us."

And as Marcella took some of her burdens from her, Miss Harden kissed Marcella's cheek with a sort of timid eagerness. She had fallen in love with Miss Boyce from the beginning, was now just advanced to this privilege of kissing, and being entirely convinced that her new friend possessed all virtues and all knowledge, found it not difficult to hold that she had been divinely sent to sustain her brother and herself in the disheartening task of civilising Mellor. Mary Harden was naturally a short, roundly made girl, neither pretty nor plain, with grey-blue eyes, a shy manner, and a heart all goodness. Her brother was like unto her — also short, round, and full-faced, with the same attractive eyes. Both were singularly young in aspect — a boy and girl pair. Both had the worn, pinched look which Mrs. Boyce complained of, and which, indeed, went oddly with their whole physique. It was as though creatures built for a normal life of easy give and take with their fellows had fallen upon some unfitting and jarring experience. One striking difference, indeed, there was between them, for amid the brother's timidity and sweetness there lay, clearly

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to be felt and seen, the consciousness of the priest — nascent and immature, but already urging and characteristic.

Only one face of the three showed any other emotion than quick pleasure at the sight of Marcella Boyce. Aldous Raeburn was clearly embarrassed thereby. Indeed, as he laid down his gun outside the low churchyard wall, while Marcella and the Hardens were greeting, that generally self-possessed though modest person was conscious of a quite disabling perturbation of mind. Why in the name of all good manners and decency had he allowed himself to be discovered in shooting trim, on that particular morning, by Mr. Boyce's daughter on her father's land, and within a stone's throw of her father's house? Was he not perfectly well aware of the curt note which his grandfather had that morning despatched to the new owner of Mellor? Had he not ineffectually tried to delay execution the night before, thereby puzzling and half-offending his grandfather? Had not the incident weighed on him ever since, wounding an admiration and sympathy which seemed to have stolen upon him in the dark, during these few weeks since he had made Miss Boyce's acquaintance, so strong and startling did he all in a moment feel them to be?

And then to intrude upon her thus, out of nothing apparently but sheer moth-like incapacity to keep away! The church footpath indeed was public property, and Miss Harden's burdens had cried aloud to any passing male to help her. But why in this neighbourhood at all? — why not rather on the other side of the county? He could have scourged himself on

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the spot for an unpardonable breach of manners and feeling.

However, Miss Boyce certainly made no sign. She received him without any *empressement*, but also without the smallest symptom of offence. They all moved into the church together, Mr. Raeburn carrying a vast bundle of ivy and fern, the rector and his sister laden with closely-packed baskets of cut flowers. Everything was laid down on the chancel steps beside Marcella's contribution, and then the Hardens began to plan out operations. Miss Harden ran over on her fingers the contributions which had been sent in to the rectory, or were presently coming over to the church in a hand-cart. "Lord Maxwell has sent the most *beautiful* pots for the chancel," she said, with a grateful look at young Raeburn. "It will be quite a show." To which the young rector assented warmly. It was very good, indeed, of Lord Maxwell to remember them always so liberally at times like these, when they had so little direct claim upon him. They were not his church or his parish, but he never forgot them all the same, and Mellor was grateful. The rector had all his sister's gentle effusiveness, but a professional dignity besides, even in his thanks, which made itself felt.

Marcella flushed as he was speaking.

"I went to see what I could get in the way of greenhouse things," she said in a sudden proud voice. "But we have nothing. There are the houses, but there is nothing in them. But you shall have all our out-of-door flowers, and I think a good deal might be done with autumn leaves and wild things if you will let me try."

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A speech which brought a flush to Mr. Raeburn's cheek as he stood in the background, and led Mary Harden into an eager asking of Marcella's counsels, and an eager praising of her flowers.

Aldous Raeburn said nothing, but his discomfort increased with every moment. Why had his grandfather been so officious in this matter of the flowers? All very well when Mellor was empty, or in the days of a miser and eccentric, without womankind, like Robert Boyce. But now — the act began to seem to him offensive, a fresh affront offered to an unprotected girl, whose quivering sensitive look as she stood talking to the Hardens touched him profoundly. Mellor church might almost be regarded as the Boyces' private chapel, so bound up was it with the family and the house. He realised painfully that he ought to be gone — yet could not tear himself away. Her passionate willingness to spend herself for the place and people she had made her own at first sight, checked every now and then by a proud and sore reserve — it was too pretty, too sad. It stung and spurred him as he watched her; one moment his foot moved for departure, the next he was resolving that somehow or other he must make speech with her — excuse — explain. Ridiculous! How was it possible that he should do either!

He had met her — perhaps had tried to meet her — tolerably often since their first chance encounter weeks ago in the vicarage drawing-room. All through there had been on his side the uncomfortable knowledge of his grandfather's antipathy to Richard Boyce, and of the social steps to which that antipathy would in-

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evitably lead. But Miss Boyce had never shown the smallest consciousness, so far, of anything untoward or unusual in her position. She had been clearly taken up with the interest and pleasure of this new spectacle upon which she had entered. The old house, its associations, its history, the beautiful country in which it lay, the speech and characteristics of rural labour as compared with that of the town, — he had heard her talk of all these things with a freshness, a human sympathy, a freedom from conventional phrase, and, no doubt, a touch of egotism and extravagance, which rivetted attention. The egotism and extravagance, however, after a first moment of critical discomfort on his part, had not in the end repelled him at all. The girl's vivid beauty glorified them; made them seem to him a mere special fulness of life. So that in his new preoccupation with herself, and by contact with her frank self-confidence, he had almost forgotten her position, and his own indirect relation to it. Then had come that unlucky note from Mellor; his grandfather's prompt reply to it; his own ineffective protest; and now this tongue-tiedness — this clumsy intrusion — which she must feel to be an indelicacy — an outrage.

Suddenly he heard Miss Harden saying, with penitent emphasis, "I *am* stupid! I have left the scissors and the wire on the table at home; we can't get on without them; it is really too bad of me."

"I will go for them," said Marcella promptly. "Here is the hand-cart just arrived and some people come to help; you can't be spared. I will be back directly."

And, gathering up her black skirt in a slim white

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hand, she sped down the church, and was out of the south door before the Hardens had time to protest, or Aldous Raeburn understood what she was doing.

A vexed word from Miss Harden enlightened him, and he went after the fugitive, overtaking her just where his gun and dog lay, outside the churchyard.

"Let me go, Miss Boyce," he said, as he caught her up. "My dog and I will run there and back."

But Marcella hardly looked at him, or paused.

"Oh no!" she said quickly, "I should like the walk."

He hesitated; then, with a flush which altered his usually quiet, self-contained expression, he moved on beside her.

"Allow me to go with you then. You are sure to find fresh loads to bring back. If it's like our harvest festival, the things keep dropping in all day."

Marcella's eyes were still on the ground.

"I thought you were on your way to shoot, Mr. Raeburn?"

"So I was, but there is no hurry; if I can be useful. Both the birds and the keeper can wait."

"Where are you going?"

"To some outlying fields of ours on the Windmill Hill. There is a tenant there who wants to see me. He is a prosy person with a host of grievances. I took my gun as a possible means of escape from him."

"Windmill Hill? I know the name. Oh! I remember: it was there — my father has just been telling me — that your father and he shot the pair of kestrels, when they were boys together."

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Her tone was quite light, but somehow it had an accent, an emphasis, which made Aldous Raeburn supremely uncomfortable. In his disquiet, he thought of various things to say; but he was not ready, nor naturally effusive; the turn of them did not please him; and he remained silent.

Meantime Marcella's heart was beating fast. She was meditating a *coup*.

"Mr. Raeburn!"

"Yes!"

"Will you think me a very extraordinary person if I ask you a question? Your father and mine were great friends, weren't they, as boys?—your family and mine were friends, altogether?"

"I believe so—I have always heard so," said her companion, flushing still redder.

"You knew Uncle Robert—Lord Maxwell did?"

"Yes—as much as anybody knew him—but—"

"Oh, I know: he shut himself up and hated his neighbours. Still you knew him, and papa and your father were boys together. Well then, if you won't mind telling me—I know it's bold to ask, but I have reasons—why does Lord Maxwell write to papa in the third person, and why has your aunt, Miss Raeburn, never found time in all these weeks to call on mamma?"

She turned and faced him, her splendid eyes one challenge. The glow and fire of the whole gesture—the daring of it, and yet the suggestion of womanish weakness in the hand which trembled against her dress and in the twitching lip—if it had been fine acting, it could not have been more complete. And,

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in a sense, acting there was in it. Marcella's emotions were real, but her mind seldom deserted her. One half of her was impulsive and passionate; the other half looked on and put in finishing touches.

Acting or no, the surprise of her outburst swept the man beside her off his feet. He found himself floundering in a sea of excuses — not for his relations, but for himself. He ought never to have intruded; it was odious, unpardonable; he had no business whatever to put himself in her way! Would she please understand that it was an accident? It should not happen again. He quite understood that she could not regard him with friendliness. And so on. He had never so lost his self-possession.

Meanwhile Marcella's brows contracted. She took his excuses as a fresh offence.

"You mean, I suppose, that I have no right to ask such questions!" she cried; "that I am not behaving like a lady — as one of your relations would? Well, I dare say! I was not brought up like that. I was not brought up at all; I have had to make myself. So you must avoid me if you like. Of course you will. But I resolved there — in the church — that I would make just one effort, before everything crystallises, to break through. If we must live on here hating our neighbours and being cut by them, I thought I would just ask you why, first. There is no one else to ask. Hardly anybody has called, except the Hardens, and a few new people that don't matter. And *I* have nothing to be ashamed of," said the girl passionately, "nor has mamma. Papa, I suppose, did some bad things long ago. I have never known — I don't know now — what

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they were. But I should like to understand. Is everybody going to cut us because of that?"

With a great effort Aldous Raeburn pulled himself together, certain fine instincts both of race and conduct coming to his help. He met her excited look by one which had both dignity and friendliness.

"I will tell you what I can, Miss Boyce. If you ask me, it is right I should. You must forgive me if I say anything that hurts you. I will try not — I will try not!" he repeated earnestly. "In the first place, I know hardly anything in detail. I do not remember that I have ever wished to know. But I gather that some years ago — when I was still a lad — something in Mr. Boyce's life — some financial matters, I believe — during the time that he was member of Parliament, made a scandal, and especially among his family and old friends. It was the effect upon his old father, I think, who, as you know, died soon afterwards —"

Marcella started.

"I didn't know," she said quickly.

Aldous Raeburn's distress grew.

"I really oughtn't to speak of these things," he said, "for I don't know them accurately. But I want to answer what you said — I do indeed. It was that, I think, chiefly. Everybody here respected and loved your grandfather — my grandfather did — and there was great feeling for him —"

"I see! I see!" said Marcella, her chest heaving; "and against papa."

She walked on quickly, hardly seeing where she was going, her eyes dim with tears. There was a wretched pause. Then Aldous Raeburn broke out —

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"But after all it is very long ago. And there may have been some harsh judgment. My grandfather may have been misinformed as to some of the facts. And I—"

He hesitated, struck with the awkwardness of what he was going to say. But Marcella understood him.

"And you will try and make him alter his mind?" she said, not ungratefully, but still with a touch of sarcasm in her tone. "No, Mr. Raeburn, I don't think that will succeed."

They walked on in silence for a little while. At last he said, turning upon her a face in which she could not but see the true feeling of a just and kindly man—

"I meant that if my grandfather could be led to express himself in a way which Mr. Boyce could accept, even if there were no great friendship as there used to be, there might be something better than this—this, which—which—is so painful. And any way, Miss Boyce, whatever happens, will you let me say this once, that there is no word, no feeling in this neighbourhood—how could there be?—towards you and your mother, but one of respect and admiration? Do believe that, even if you feel that you can never be friendly towards me and mine again—or forget the things I have said!"

"Respect and admiration!" said Marcella, wondering, and still scornful. "Pity, perhaps. There might be that. But any way mamma goes with papa. She always has done. She always will. So shall I, of course. But I am sorry—*horribly* sore and sorry! I was so delighted to come here. I have been very

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little at home, and understood hardly anything about this worry — not how serious it was, nor what it meant. Oh! I *am* sorry — there was so much I wanted to do here — if anybody could only understand what it means to me to come to this place!"

They had reached the brow of a little rising ground. Just below them, beyond a stubble field in which there were a few bent forms of gleaners, lay the small scattered village, hardly seen amid its trees, the curls of its blue smoke ascending steadily on this calm September morning against a great belt of distant beechwood which begirt the hamlet and the common along which it lay. The stubble field was a feast of shade and tint, of apricots and golds shot with the subtlest purples and browns; the flame of the wild-cherry leaf and the deeper crimson of the haws made every hedge a wonder; the apples gleamed in the cottage garden; and a cloudless sun poured down on field and hedge, and on the half-hidden medley of tiled roofs, sharp gables, and jutting dormers which made the village.

Instinctively both stopped. Marcella locked her hands behind her in a gesture familiar to her in moments of excitement; the light wind blew back her dress in soft, eddying folds; for the moment, in her tall grace, she had the air of some young Victory poised upon a height, till you looked at her face, which was, indeed, not exultant at all, but tragic, extravagantly tragic, as Aldous Raeburn, in his English reserve, would perhaps have thought in the case of any woman with tamer eyes and a less winning mouth.

"I don't want to talk about myself," she began. "But you know, Mr. Raeburn — you must know —

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what a state of things there is here — you know what a *disgrace* that village is. Oh! one reads books, but I never thought people could actually *live* like that — here in the wide country, with room for all. It makes me lie awake at night. We are not rich — we are very poor — the house is all out of repair, and the estate, as of course you know, is in a wretched condition. But when I see these cottages, and the water, and the children, I ask what right we have to anything we get. I had some friends in London who were Socialists, and I followed and agreed with them, but here one *sees!* Yes, indeed! — it *is* too great a risk to let the individual alone when all these lives depend upon him. Uncle Robert was an eccentric and a miser; and look at the death-rate of the village — look at the children; you can see how it has crushed the Hardens already. No, we have no right to it! — it ought to be taken from us; some day it will be taken from us!"

Aldous Raeburn smiled, and was himself again. A woman's speculations were easier to deal with than a woman's distress.

"It is not so hopeless as that, I think," he said kindly. "The Mellor cottages are in a bad state certainly. But you have no idea how soon a little energy and money and thought sets things to rights."

"But we have no money!" cried Marcella. "And if he is miserable here, my father will have no energy to do anything. He will not care what happens. He will defy everybody, and just spend what he has on himself. And it will make me wretched — *wretched.* Look at that cottage to the right, Mr. Raeburn. It is Jim Hurd's — a man who works mainly on the Church

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Farm, when he is in work. But he is deformed, and not so strong as others. The farmers too seem to be cutting down labour everywhere — of course I don't understand — I am so new to it. Hurd and his family had an *awful* winter, last winter — hardly kept body and soul together. And now he is out of work already — the man at the Church Farm turned him off directly after harvest. He sees no prospect of getting work by the winter. He spends his days tramping to look for it; but nothing turns up. Last winter they parted with all they could sell. This winter it must be the workhouse! It's *heart-breaking.* And he has a mind; he can *feel!* I lend him the Labour paper I take in, and get him to talk. He has more education than most, and oh! the *bitterness* at the bottom of him. But not against persons — individuals. It is like a sort of blind patience when you come to that — they make excuses even for Uncle Robert, to whom they have paid rent all these years for a cottage which is a crime — yes, a *crime!* The woman must have been such a pretty creature — and refined too. She is consumptive, of course — what else could you expect with that cottage and that food? So is the eldest boy — a little white atomy! And the other children. Talk of London — I never saw such sickly objects as there are in this village. Twelve shillings a week, and work about half the year! Oh! they *ought* to hate us! — I try to make them," cried Marcella, her eyes gleaming. "They ought to hate all of us landowners, and the whole wicked system. It keeps them from the land which they ought to be sharing with us; it makes one man master, instead of all men brothers. And who is

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fit to be master? Which of us? Everybody is so ready to take the charge of other people's lives, and then look at the result!"

"Well, the result, even in rural England, is not always so bad," said Aldous Raeburn, smiling a little, but more coldly. Marcella, glancing at him, understood in a moment that she had roused a certain family and class pride in him — a pride which was not going to assert itself, but none the less implied the sudden opening of a gulf between herself and him. In an instant her quick imagination realised herself as the daughter and niece of two discredited members of a great class. When she attacked the class, or the system, the man beside her — any man in similar circumstances — must naturally think: "Ah, well, poor girl — Dick Boyce's daughter — what can you expect?" Whereas — Aldous Raeburn! — she thought of the dignity of the Maxwell name, of the width of the Maxwell possessions, balanced only by the high reputation of the family for honourable, just and Christian living, whether as amongst themselves or towards their neighbours and dependents. A shiver of passionate vanity, wrath, and longing passed through her as her tall frame stiffened.

"There are model squires, of course," she said slowly, striving at least for a personal dignity which should match his. "There are plenty of landowners who do their duty as they understand it — no one denies that. But that does not affect the system; the grandson of the best man may be the worst, but his one-man power remains the same. No! the time has come for a wider basis. Paternal government and

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charity were very well in their way — democratic self-government will manage to do without them!"

She flung him a gay, quivering, defiant look. It delighted her to pit these wide and threatening generalisations against the Maxwell power — to show the heir of it that she at least — father or no father — was no hereditary subject of his, and bound to no blind admiration of the Maxwell methods and position.

Aldous Raeburn took her onslaught very calmly, smiling frankly back at her indeed all the time. Miss Boyce's opinions could hardly matter to him intellectually, whatever charm and stimulus he might find in her talk. This subject of the duties, rights, and prospects of his class went, as it happened, very deep with him — too deep for chance discussion. What she said, if he ever stopped to think of it in itself, seemed to him a compound of elements derived partly from her personal history, partly from the random opinions that young people of a generous type pick up from newspapers and magazines. She had touched his family pride for an instant; but only for an instant. What he was abidingly conscious of, was of a beautiful wild creature struggling with difficulties in which he was somehow himself concerned, and out of which, in some way or other, he was becoming more and more determined — absurdly determined — to help her.

"Oh! no doubt the world will do very well without us some day," he said lightly, in answer to her tirade; "no one is indispensable. But are you so sure, Miss Boyce, you believe in your own creed? I thought I

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had observed — pardon me for saying it — on the two or three occasions we have met, some degenerate signs of individualism? You take pleasure in the old place, you say; you were delighted to come and live where your ancestors lived before you; you are full of desires to pull these poor people out of the mire in your own way. No! I don't feel that you are thoroughgoing!"

Marcella paused a frowning moment, then broke suddenly into a delightful laugh — a laugh of humorous confession, which changed her whole look and mood.

"Is that all you have noticed? If you wish to know, Mr. Raeburn, I love the labourers for touching their hats to me. I love the school children for bobbing to me. I love my very self — ridiculous as *you* may think it — for being Miss Boyce of Mellor!"

"Don't say things like that, please!" he interrupted; "I think I have not deserved them."

His tone made her repent her gibe. "No, indeed, you have been most kind to me," she cried. "I don't know how it is. I am bitter and personal in a moment — when I don't mean to be. Yes! you are quite right. I am proud of it all. If nobody comes to see us, and we are left all alone out in the cold, I shall still have room enough to be proud in — proud of the old house and our few bits of pictures, and the family papers, and the beeches! How absurd it would seem to other people, who have so much more! But I have had so little — *so little!*" Her voice had a hungry lingering note. "And as for the people, yes, I am proud too that they like me, and that already I can influence them. Oh, I will do my best for them, my

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very best! But it will be hard, very hard, if there is no one to help me!"

She heaved a long sigh. In spite of the words, what she had said did not seem to be an appeal for his pity. Rather there was in it a sweet self-dedicating note as of one going sadly alone to a painful task, a note which once more left Aldous Raeburn's self-restraint tottering. She was walking gently beside him, her pretty dress trailing lightly over the dry stubble, her hand in its white ruffles hanging so close beside him — after all her prophetess airs a pensive womanly thing, that must surely hear how his strong man's heart was beginning to beat!

He bent over to her.

"Don't talk of there being no one to help! There may be many ways out of present difficulties. Meanwhile, however things go, could you be large-minded enough to count one person here your friend?"

She looked up at him. Tall as she was, he was taller — she liked that; she liked too the quiet cautious strength of his English expression and bearing. She did not think him handsome, and she was conscious of no thrill. But inwardly her quick dramatising imagination was already constructing her own future and his. The ambition to rule leapt in her, and the delight in conquest. It was with a delicious sense of her own power, and of the general fulness of her new life, that she said, "I *am* large-minded enough! You have been very kind, and I have been very wild and indiscreet. But I don't regret: I am sure, if you can help me, you will."

There was a little pause. They were standing at

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the last gate before the miry village road began, and almost in sight of the little vicarage. Aldous Raeburn, with his hand on the gate, suddenly gathered a spray of travellers'-joy out of the hedge beside him.

"That was a promise, I think, and I keep the pledge of it," he said, and with a smile put the cluster of white seed-tufts and green leaves into one of the pockets of his shooting jacket.

"Oh, don't tie me down!" said Marcella, laughing, but flushing also. "And don't you think, Mr. Raeburn, that you might open that gate? At least, we can't get the scissors and the wire unless you do."

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CHAPTER V.

The autumn evening was far advanced when Aldous Raeburn, after his day's shooting, passed again by the gates of Mellor Park on his road home. He glanced up the ill-kept drive, with its fine overhanging limes, caught a glimpse to the left of the little church, and to the right, of the long eastern front of the house; lingered a moment to watch the sunset light streaming through the level branches of two distant cedars, standing black and sharp against the fiery west, and then walked briskly forwards in the mood of a man going as fast as may be to an appointment he both desires and dreads.

He had given his gun to the keeper, who had already sped far ahead of him, in the shooting-cart which his master had declined. His dog, a black retriever, was at his heels, and both dog and man were somewhat weary and stiff with exercise. But for the privilege of solitude, Aldous Raeburn would at that moment have faced a good deal more than the two miles of extra walking which now lay between him and Maxwell Court.

About him, as he trudged on, lay a beautiful world of English woodland. After he had passed through the hamlet of Mellor, with its three-cornered piece of open common, and its patches of arable — represent-

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ing the original forest-clearing made centuries ago by the primitive fathers of the village in this corner of the Chiltern uplands — the beech woods closed thickly round him. Beech woods of all kinds — from forest slopes, where majestic trees, grey and soaring pillars of the woodland roof, stood in stately isolation on the dead-leaf carpet woven by the years about their carved and polished bases, to the close plantations of young trees, where the saplings crowded on each other, and here and there amid the airless tangle of leaf and branch some long pheasant-drive, cut straight through the green heart of the wood, refreshed the seeking eye with its arched and far-receding path. Two or three times on his walk Aldous heard from far within the trees the sounds of hatchet and turner's wheel, which told him he was passing one of the wood-cutter's huts that in the hilly parts of this district supply the first simple steps of the chairmaking industry, carried on in the little factory towns of the more populous valleys. And two or three times also he passed a string of the great timber carts which haunt the Chiltern lanes; the patient team of brown horses straining at the weight behind them, the vast prostrate trunks rattling in their chains, and the smoke from the carters' pipes rising slowly into the damp sunset air. But for the most part the road along which he walked was utterly forsaken of human kind. Nor were there any signs of habitation — no cottages, no farms. He was scarcely more than thirty miles from London; yet in this solemn evening glow it would have been hardly possible to find a remoter, lonelier nature than that through which he was passing.

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And presently the solitude took a grander note. He was nearing the edge of the high upland along which he had been walking. In front of him the long road with its gleaming pools bent sharply to the left, showing pale and distinct against a darkening heaven and the wide grey fields which had now, on one side of his path, replaced the serried growth of young plantations. Night was fast advancing from south and east over the upland. But straight in front of him and on his right, the forest trees, still flooded with sunset, fell in sharp steeps towards the plain. Through their straight stems glowed the blues and purples of that lower world; and when the slopes broke and opened here and there, above the rounded masses of their red and golden leaf the level distances of the plain could be seen stretching away, illimitable in the evening dusk, to a west of glory, just vacant of the sun. The golden ball had sunk into the mists awaiting it, but the splendour of its last rays was still on all the western front of the hills, bathing the beech woods as they rose and fell with the large undulations of the ground.

Insensibly Raeburn, filled as he was with a new and surging emotion, drew the solemnity of the forest glades and of the rolling distances into his heart. When he reached the point where the road diverged to the left, he mounted a little grassy ridge, whence he commanded the whole sweep of the hill rampart from north to west, and the whole expanse of the low country beneath, and there stood gazing for some minutes, lost in many thoughts, while the night fell.

He looked over the central plain of England — the plain which stretches westward to the Thames and the

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Berkshire hills, and northward through the Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire lowlands to the basin of the Trent. An historic plain — symbolic, all of it, to an English eye. There in the western distance, amid the light-filled mists, lay Oxford; in front of him was the site of Chalgrove Field, where Hampden got his clumsy death wound, and Thame, where he died; and far away, to his right, where the hills swept to the north, he could just discern, gleaming against the face of the down, the vast scoured cross, whereby a Saxon king had blazoned his victory over his Danish foes to all the plain beneath.

Aldous Raeburn was a man to feel these things. He had seldom stood on this high point, in such an evening calm, without the expansion in him of all that was most manly, most English, most strenuous. If it had not been so, indeed, he must have been singularly dull of soul. For the great view had an interest for him personally it could hardly have possessed to the same degree for any other man. On his left hand Maxwell Court rose among its woods on the brow of the hill — a splendid pile which some day would be his. Behind him; through all the upland he had just traversed; beneath the point where he stood; along the sides of the hills, and far into the plain, stretched the land which also would be his — which, indeed, practically was already his — for his grandfather was an old man with a boundless trust in the heir on whom his affections and hopes were centred. The dim churches scattered over the immediate plain below; the villages clustered round them, where dwelt the toilers in these endless fields; the farms

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amid their trees; the cottages showing here and there on the fringes of the wood — all the equipment and organisation of popular life over an appreciable part of the English midland at his feet, depended to an extent hardly to be exaggerated, under the conditions of the England of to-day, upon him — upon his one man's brain and conscience, the degree of his mental and moral capacity.

In his first youth, of course, the thought had often roused a boy's tremulous elation and sense of romance. Since his Cambridge days, and of late years, any more acute or dramatic perception than usual of his lot in life had been wont to bring with it rather a consciousness of weight than of inspiration. Sensitive, fastidious, reflective, he was disturbed by remorses and scruples which had never plagued his forefathers. During his college days, the special circumstances of a great friendship had drawn him into the full tide of a social speculation which, as it happened, was destined to go deeper with him than with most men. The responsibilities of the rich, the disadvantages of the poor, the relation of the State to the individual — of the old Radical dogma of free contract to the thwarting facts of social inequality; the Tory ideal of paternal government by the few as compared with the Liberal ideal of self-government by the many: these commonplaces of economical and political discussion had very early become living and often sore realities in Aldous Raeburn's mind, because of the long conflict in him, dating from his Cambridge life, between the influences of birth and early education and the influences of an admiring and profound affection which had opened to him the gates of a new moral world.

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Towards the close of his first year at Trinity, a young man joined the college who rapidly became, in spite of various practical disadvantages, a leader among the best and keenest of his fellows. He was poor and held a small scholarship; but it was soon plain that his health was not equal to the Tripos routine, and that the prizes of the place, brilliant as was his intellectual endowment, were not for him. After an inward struggle, of which none perhaps but Aldous Raeburn had any exact knowledge, he laid aside his first ambitions and turned himself to another career. A couple of hours' serious brainwork in the day was all that was ever possible to him henceforward. He spent it, as well as the thoughts and conversation of his less strenuous moments, on the study of history and sociology, with a view to joining the staff of lecturers for the manufacturing and country towns which the two great Universities, touched by new and popular sympathies, were then beginning to organise. He came of a stock which promised well for such a pioneer's task. His father had been an able factory inspector, well-known for his share in the inauguration and revision of certain important factory reforms; the son inherited a passionate humanity of soul; and added to it a magnetic and personal charm which soon made him a remarkable power, not only in his own college, but among the finer spirits of the University generally. He had the gift which enables a man, sitting perhaps after dinner in a mixed society of his college contemporaries, to lead the way imperceptibly from the casual subjects of the hour — the river, the dons, the schools — to arguments "of great pith and moment," discus-

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sions that search the moral and intellectual powers of the men concerned to the utmost, without exciting distrust or any but an argumentative opposition. Edward Hallin could do this without a pose, without a false note, nay, rather by the natural force of a boyish intensity and simplicity. To many a Trinity man in after life the memory of his slight figure and fair head, of the eager slightly parted mouth, of the eyes glowing with some inward vision, and of the gesture with which he would spring up at some critical point to deliver himself, standing amid his seated and often dissentient auditors, came back vivid and ineffaceable as only youth can make the image of its prophets.

Upon Aldous Raeburn, Edward Hallin produced from the first a deep impression. The interests to which Hallin's mind soon became exclusively devoted — such as the systematic study of English poverty, or of the relation of religion to social life, reforms of the land and of the Church — overflowed upon Raeburn with a kindling and disturbing force. Edward Hallin was his gad-fly; and he had no resource, because he loved his tormentor.

Fundamentally, the two men were widely different. Raeburn was a true son of his fathers, possessed by natural inheritance of the finer instincts of aristocratic rule, including a deep contempt for mob-reason and all the vulgarities of popular rhetoric; steeped, too, in a number of subtle prejudices, and in a silent but intense pride of family of the nobler sort. He followed with disquiet and distrust the quick motions and conclusions of Hallin's intellect. Temperament and the Cambridge discipline made him a fastidious

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thinker and a fine scholar; his mind worked slowly, yet with a delicate precision; and his generally cold manner was the natural protection of feelings which had never yet, except in the case of his friendship with Edward Hallin, led him to much personal happiness.

Hallin left Cambridge after a pass degree to become lecturer on industrial and economical questions in the northern English towns. Raeburn stayed on a year longer, found himself third classic and the winner of a Greek verse prize, and then, sacrificing the idea of a fellowship, returned to Maxwell Court to be his grandfather's companion and helper in the work of the estate, his family proposing that, after a few years' practical experience of the life and occupations of a country gentleman, he should enter Parliament and make a career in politics. Since then five or six years had passed, during which he had learned to know the estate thoroughly, and to take his normal share in the business and pleasures of the neighbourhood. For the last two years he had been his grandfather's sole agent, a poor-law guardian and magistrate besides, and a member of most of the various committees for social and educational purposes in the county. He was a sufficiently keen sportsman to save appearances with his class; enjoyed a walk after the partridges indeed, with a friend or two, as much as most men; and played the host at the two or three great battues of the year with a propriety which his grandfather however no longer mistook for enthusiasm. There was nothing much to distinguish him from any other able man of his rank. His neighbours felt him

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to be a personality, but thought him reserved and difficult; he was respected, but he was not popular like his grandfather; people speculated as to how he would get on in Parliament, or whom he was to marry; but, except to the dwellers in Maxwell Court itself, or of late to the farmers and labourers on the estate, it would not have mattered much to anybody if he had not been there. Nobody ever connected any romantic thought with him. There was something in his strong build, pale but healthy aquiline face, his inconspicuous brown eyes and hair, which seemed from the beginning to mark him out as the ordinary earthy dweller in an earthy world.

Nevertheless, these years had been to Aldous Raeburn years marked by an expansion and deepening of the whole man, such as few are capable of. Edward Hallin's visits to the Court, the walking tours which brought the two friends together almost every year in Switzerland or the Highlands, the course of a full and intimate correspondence, and the various calls made for public purposes by the enthusiast and pioneer upon the pocket and social power of the rich man — these things and influences, together, of course, with the pressure of an environing world, ever more real, and, on the whole, ever more oppressive, as it was better understood, had confronted Aldous Raeburn before now with a good many teasing problems of conduct and experience. His tastes, his sympathies, his affinities were all with the old order; but the old faiths — economical, social, religious — were fermenting within him in different stages of disintegration

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and reconstruction; and his reserved habit and often solitary life tended to scrupulosity and over-refinement. His future career as a landowner and politician was by no means clear to him. One thing only was clear to him — that to dogmatise about any subject under heaven, at the present day, more than the immediate practical occasion absolutely demanded, was the act of an idiot.

So that Aldous Raeburn's moments of reflection had been constantly mixed with struggle of different kinds. And the particular point of view where he stood on this September evening had been often associated in his memory with flashes of self-realisation which were, on the whole, more of a torment to him than a joy. If he had not been Aldous Raeburn, or any other person, tied to a particular individuality, with a particular place and label in the world, the task of the analytic mind, in face of the spectacle of what is, would have been a more possible one! — so it had often seemed to him.

But to-night all this cumbering consciousness, all these self-made doubts and worries, had for the moment dropped clean away! A transfigured man it was that lingered at the old spot — a man once more young, divining with enchantment the approach of passion, feeling at last through all his being the ecstasy of a self-surrender, long missed, long hungered for.

Six weeks was it since he had first seen her — this tall, straight, Marcella Boyce? He shut his eyes impatiently against the disturbing golds and purples of the sunset, and tried to see her again as she had walked beside him across the church fields, in that

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thin black dress, with the shadow of the hat across her brow and eyes — the small white teeth flashing as she talked and smiled, the hand so ready with its gesture, so restless, so alive! What a presence — how absorbing, troubling, preoccupying! No one in her company could forget her — nay, could fail to observe her. What ease and daring, and yet no hardness with it — rather deep on deep of womanly weakness, softness, passion, beneath it all!

How straight she had flung her questions at him! — her most awkward embarrassing questions. What other woman would have dared such candour — unless perhaps as a stroke of fine art — he had known women indeed who could have done it so. But where could be the art, the policy, he asked himself indignantly, in the sudden outburst of a young girl pleading with her companion's sense of truth and good feeling in behalf of those nearest to her?

As to her dilemma itself, in his excitement he thought of it with nothing but the purest pleasure! She had let him see that she did not expect him to be able to do much for her, though she was ready to believe him her friend. Ah well — he drew a long breath. For once, Raeburn, strange compound that he was of the man of rank and the philosopher, remembered his own social power and position with an exultant satisfaction. No doubt Dick Boyce had misbehaved himself badly — the strength of Lord Maxwell's feeling was sufficient proof thereof. No doubt the "county," as Raeburn himself knew, in some detail, were disposed to leave Mellor Park severely alone. What of that? Was it for nothing that the

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Maxwells had been for generations at the head of the "county," i.e. of that circle of neighbouring families connected by the ties of ancestral friendship, or of intermarriage, on whom in this purely agricultural and rural district the social pleasure and comfort of Miss Boyce and her mother must depend?

He, like Marcella, did not believe that Richard Boyce's offences were of the quite unpardonable order; although, owing to a certain absent and preoccupied temper, he had never yet taken the trouble to enquire into them in detail. As to any real restoration of cordiality between the owner of Mellor and his father's old friends and connections, that of course was not to be looked for; but there should be decent social recognition, and—in the case of Mrs. Boyce and her daughter—there should be homage and warm welcome, simply because she wished it, and it was absurd she should not have it! Raeburn, whose mind was ordinarily destitute of the most elementary capacity for social intrigue, began to plot in detail how it should be done. He relied first upon winning his grandfather—his popular distinguished grandfather, whose lightest word had weight in Brookshire. And then, he himself had two or three women friends in the county—not more, for women had not occupied much place in his thoughts till now. But they were good friends, and, from the social point of view, important. He would set them to work at once. These things should be chiefly managed by women.

But no patronage! She would never bear that, the glancing proud creature. She must guess, indeed, let him tread as delicately as he might, that he and others

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were at work for her. But oh! she should be softly handled; as far as he could achieve it, she should, in a very little while, live and breathe compassed with warm airs of good-will and consideration.

He felt himself happy, amazingly happy, that at the very beginning of his love, it should thus be open to him, in these trivial, foolish ways, to please and befriend her. Her social dilemma and discomfort one moment, indeed, made him sore for her; the next, they were a kind of joy, since it was they gave him this opportunity to put out a strong right arm.

Everything about her at this moment was divine and lovely to him; all the qualities of her rich uneven youth which she had shown in their short intercourse — her rashness, her impulsiveness, her generosity. Let her but trust herself to him, and she should try her social experiments as she pleased — she should plan Utopias, and he would be her hodman to build them. The man perplexed with too much thinking remembered the girl's innocent, ignorant readiness to stamp the world's stuff anew after the forms of her own pitying thought, with a positive thirst of sympathy. The deep poetry and ideality at the root of him under all the weight of intellectual and critical debate leapt towards her. He thought of the rapid talk she had poured out upon him, after their compact of friendship, in their walk back to the church, of her enthusiasm for her Socialist friends and their ideals, — with a momentary madness of self-suppression and tender humility. In reality, a man like Aldous Raeburn is born to be the judge and touchstone of natures like Marcella Boyce. But the illusion of passion

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may deal as disturbingly with moral rank as with social.

It was his first love. Years before, in the vacation before he went to college, his boyish mind had been crossed by a fancy for a pretty cousin a little older than himself, who had been very kind indeed to Lord Maxwell's heir. But then came Cambridge, the flow of a new mental life, his friendship for Edward Hallin, and the beginnings of a moral storm and stress. When he and the cousin next met, he was quite cold to her. She seemed to him a pretty piece of millinery, endowed with a trick of parrot phrases. She, on her part, thought him detestable; she married shortly afterwards, and often spoke to her husband in private of her "escape" from that queer fellow Aldous Raeburn.

Since then he had known plenty of pretty and charming women, both in London and in the country, and had made friends with some of them in his quiet serious way. But none of them had roused in him even a passing thrill of passion. He had despised himself for it; had told himself again and again that he was but half a man —

Ah! he had done himself injustice — he had done himself injustice!

His heart was light as air. When at last the sound of a clock striking in the plain roused him with a start, and he sprang up from the heap of stones where he had been sitting in the dusk, he bent down a moment to give a gay caress to his dog, and then trudged off briskly home, whistling under the emerging stars.

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CHAPTER VI.

By the time, however, that Aldous Raeburn came within sight of the windows of Maxwell Court his first exaltation had sobered down. The lover had fallen, for the time, into the background, and the capable, serious man of thirty, with a considerable experience of the world behind him, was perfectly conscious that there were many difficulties in his path. He could not induce his grandfather to move in the matter of Richard Boyce without a statement of his own feelings and aims. Nor would he have avoided frankness if he could. On every ground it was his grandfather's due. The Raeburns were reserved towards the rest of the world, but amongst themselves there had always been a fine tradition of mutual trust; and Lord Maxwell amply deserved that at this particular moment his grandson should maintain it.

But Raeburn could not and did not flatter himself that his grandfather would, to begin with, receive his news even with toleration. The grim satisfaction with which that note about the shooting had been despatched, was very clear in the grandson's memory. At the same time it said much for the history of those long years during which the old man and his heir had been left to console each other for the terrible bereavements which had thrown them together, that Aldous

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Raeburn never for an instant feared the kind of violent outburst and opposition that other men in similar circumstances might have looked forward to. The just living of a life-time makes a man incapable of any mere selfish handling of another's interests — a fact on which the bystander may reckon.

It was quite dark by the time he entered the large open-roofed hall of the Court.

"Is his lordship in?" he asked of a passing footman.

"Yes, sir — in the library. He has been asking for you, sir."

Aldous turned to the right along the fine corridor lighted with Tudor windows to an inner quadrangle, and filled with Græco-Roman statuary and sarcophagi, which made one of the principal features of the Court. The great house was warm and scented, and the various open doors which he passed on his way to the library disclosed large fire-lit rooms, with panelling, tapestry, pictures, books everywhere. The colour of the whole was dim and rich; antiquity, refinement reigned, together with an exquisite quiet and order. No one was to be seen, and not a voice was to be heard; but there was no impression of solitude. These warm, darkly-glowing rooms seemed to be waiting for the return of guests just gone out of them; not one of them but had an air of cheerful company. For once, as he walked through it, Aldous Raeburn spared the old house an affectionate possessive thought. Its size and wealth, with all that both implied, had often weighed upon him. To-night his breath quickened as he passed the range of family portraits leading to the library door. There

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was a vacant space here and there — "room for your missus, too, my boy, when you get her!" as his grandfather had once put it.

"Why, you've had a long day, Aldous, all by yourself," said Lord Maxwell, turning sharply round at the sound of the opening door. "What's kept you so late?"

His spectacles fell forward as he spoke, and the old man shut them in his hand, peering at his grandson through the shadows of the room. He was sitting by a huge fire, an "Edinburgh Review" open on his knee. Lamp and fire-light showed a finely-carried head, with a high wave of snowy hair thrown back, a long face delicately sharp in the lines, and an attitude instinct with the alertness of an unimpaired bodily vigour.

"The birds were scarce, and we followed them a good way," said Aldous, as he came up to the fire. "Rickman kept me on the farm, too, a good while, with interminable screeds about the things he wants done for him."

"Oh, there is no end to Rickman," said Lord Maxwell, good-humouredly. "He pays his rent for the amusement of getting it back again. Landowning will soon be the most disinterested form of philanthropy known to mankind. But I have some news for you! Here is a letter from Barton by the second post" — he named an old friend of his own, and a Cabinet Minister of the day. "Look at it. You will see he says they can't possibly carry on beyond January. Half their men are becoming unmanageable, and S——'s bill, to which they are committed, will certainly dish them. Parliament will meet in January,

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and he thinks an amendment to the Address will finish it. All this confidential, of course; but he saw no harm in letting me know. So now, my boy, you will have your work cut out for you this winter! Two or three evenings a week — you'll not get off with less. Nobody's plum drops into his mouth nowadays. Barton tells me, too, that he hears young Wharton will certainly stand for the Durnford division, and will be down upon us directly. He will make himself as disagreeable to us and the Levens as he can — that we may be sure of. We may be thankful for one small mercy, that his mother has departed this life! otherwise you and I would have known *furens quid femina posset!*"

The old man looked up at his grandson with a humorous eye. Aldous was standing absently before the fire, and did not reply immediately.

"Come, come, Aldous!" said Lord Maxwell with a touch of impatience, "don't overdo the philosopher. Though I am getting old, the next Government can't deny me a finger in the pie. You and I between us will be able to pull through two or three of the things we care about in the next House, with ordinary luck. It is my firm belief that the next election will give our side the best chance we have had for half a generation. Throw up your cap, sir! The world may be made of green cheese, but we have got to live in it!"

Aldous smiled suddenly — uncontrollably — with a look which left his grandfather staring. He had been appealing to the man of maturity standing on the threshold of a possibly considerable career, and, as he

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did so, it was as though he saw the boy of eighteen reappear!

"*Je ne demande pas mieux!*" said Aldous with a quick lift of the voice above its ordinary key. "The fact is, grandfather, I have come home with something in my mind very different from politics — and you must give me time to change the focus. I did not come home as straight as I might — for I wanted to be sure of myself before I spoke to you. During the last few weeks —"

"Go on!" cried Lord Maxwell.

But Aldous did not find it easy to go on. It suddenly struck him that it was after all absurd that he should be confiding in any one at such a stage, and his tongue stumbled.

But he had gone too far for retreat. Lord Maxwell sprang up and seized him by the arms.

"You are in love, sir! Out with it!"

"I have seen the only woman in the world I have ever wished to marry," said Aldous, flushing, but with deliberation. "Whether she will ever have me, I have no idea. But I can conceive no greater happiness than to win her. And as I want *you*, grandfather, to do something for her and for me, it seemed to me I had no right to keep my feelings to myself. Besides, I am not accustomed to — to —" His voice wavered a little. "You have treated me as more than a son!"

Lord Maxwell pressed his arm affectionately.

"My dear boy! But don't keep me on tenterhooks like this — tell me the name! — the name!"

And two or three long meditated possibilities flashed through the old man's mind.

Aldous replied with a certain slow stiffness —

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"Marcella Boyce! — Richard Boyce's daughter. I saw her first six weeks ago."

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Lord Maxwell, falling back a step or two, and staring at his companion. Aldous watched him with anxiety.

"You know that fellow's history, Aldous?"

"Richard Boyce? Not in detail. If you will tell me now all you know, it will be a help. Of course, I see that you and the neighbourhood mean to cut him, — and — for the sake of — of Miss Boyce and her mother, I should be glad to find a way out."

"Good heavens!" said Lord Maxwell, beginning to pace the room, hands pressed behind him, head bent. "Good heavens! what a business! what an extraordinary business!"

He stopped short in front of Aldous. "Where have you been meeting her — this young lady?"

"At the Hardens' — sometimes in Mellor village. She goes about among the cottages a great deal."

"You have not proposed to her?"

"I was not certain of myself till to-day. Besides it would have been presumption so far. She has shown me nothing but the merest friendliness."

"What, you can suppose she would refuse you!" cried Lord Maxwell, and could not for the life of him keep the sarcastic intonation out of his voice.

Aldous's look showed distress. "You have not seen her, grandfather," he said quietly.

Lord Maxwell began to pace again, trying to restrain the painful emotion that filled him. Of course, Aldous had been entrapped; the girl had played upon his pity, his chivalry — for obvious reasons.

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Aldous tried to soothe him, to explain, but Lord Maxwell hardly listened. At last he threw himself into his chair again with a long breath.

"Give me time, Aldous — give me time. The thought of marrying my heir to that man's daughter knocks me over a little."

There was silence again. Then Lord Maxwell looked at his watch with old-fashioned precision.

"There is half an hour before dinner. Sit down, and let us talk this thing out."

The conversation thus started, however, was only begun by dinner-time; was resumed after Miss Raeburn — the small, shrewd, bright-eyed person who governed Lord Maxwell's household — had withdrawn; and was continued in the library some time beyond his lordship's usual retiring hour. It was for the most part a monologue on the part of the grandfather, broken by occasional words from his companion; and for some time Marcella Boyce herself — the woman whom Aldous desired to marry — was hardly mentioned in it. Oppressed and tormented by a surprise which struck, or seemed to strike, at some of his most cherished ideals and just resentments, Lord Maxwell was bent upon letting his grandson know, in all their fulness, the reasons why no daughter of Richard Boyce could ever be, in the true sense, fit wife for a Raeburn.

Aldous was, of course, perfectly familiar with the creed implied in it all. A Maxwell should give himself no airs whatever, should indeed feel no pride whatever, towards "men of goodwill," whether peas-

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ant, professional, or noble. Such airs or such feeling would be both vulgar and unchristian. But when it came to *marriage*, then it behoved him to see that "the family" — that carefully grafted and selected stock to which he owed so much — should suffer no loss or deterioration through him. Marriage with the fit woman meant for a Raeburn the preservation of a pure blood, of a dignified and honourable family habit, and moreover the securing to his children such an atmosphere of self-respect within, and of consideration from without, as he had himself grown up in. And a woman could not be fit, in this sense, who came either of an insignificant stock, untrained to large uses and opportunities, or of a stock which had degenerated, and lost its right of equal mating with the vigorous owners of unblemished names. Money was of course important and not to be despised, but the present Lord Maxwell, at any rate, large-minded and conscious of wealth he could never spend, laid comparatively little stress upon it; whereas, in his old age, the other instinct had but grown the stronger with him, as the world waxed more democratic, and the influence of the great families waned.

Nor could Aldous pretend to be insensible to such feelings and beliefs. Supposing the daughter could be won, there was no doubt whatever that Richard Boyce would be a cross and burden to a Raeburn son-in-law. But then! After all! Love for once made philosophy easy — made class tradition sit light. Impatience grew; a readiness to believe Richard Boyce as black as Erebus and be done with it, — so that one might get to the point — the real point.

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As to the story, it came to this. In his youth, Richard Boyce had been the younger and favourite son of his father. He possessed some ability, some good looks, some manners, all of which were wanting in his loutish elder brother. Sacrifices were accordingly made for him. He was sent to the bar. When he stood for Parliament his election expenses were jubilantly paid, and his father afterwards maintained him with as generous a hand as the estate could possibly bear, often in the teeth of the grudging resentment of Robert his firstborn. Richard showed signs of making a rapid success, at any rate on the political platform. He spoke with facility, and grappled with the drudgery of committees during his first two years at Westminster in a way to win him the favourable attention of the Tory whips. He had a gift for modern languages, and spoke chiefly on foreign affairs, so that when an important Eastern Commission had to be appointed, in connection with some troubles in the Balkan States, his merits and his father's exertions with certain old family friends sufficed to place him upon it.

The Commission was headed by a remarkable man, and was able to do valuable work at a moment of great public interest, under the eyes of Europe. Its members came back covered with distinction, and were much fêted through the London season. Old Mr. Boyce came up from Mellor to see Dick's success for himself, and his rubicund country gentleman's face and white head might have been observed at many a London party beside the small Italianate physique of his son.

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And love, as he is wont, came in the wake of fortune. A certain fresh west-country girl, Miss Evelyn Merritt, who had shown her stately beauty at one of the earliest drawing-rooms of the season, fell across Mr. Richard Boyce at this moment when he was most at ease with the world, and the world was giving him every opportunity. She was very young, as unspoilt as the daffodils of her Somersetshire valleys, and her character — a character of much complexity and stoical strength — was little more known to herself than it was to others. She saw Dick Boyce through a mist of romance; forgot herself absolutely in idealising him, and could have thanked him on her knees when he asked her to marry him.

Five years of Parliament and marriage followed, and then — a crash. It was a common and sordid story, made tragic by the quality of the wife, and the disappointment of the father, if not by the ruined possibilities of Dick Boyce himself. First, the desire to maintain a "position," to make play in society with a pretty wife, and, in the City, with a marketable reputation; then company-promoting of a more and more doubtful kind; and, finally, a swindle more energetic and less skilful than the rest, which bomb-like went to pieces in the face of the public, filling the air with noise, lamentations, and unsavoury odours. Nor was this all. A man has many warnings of ruin, and when things were going badly in the stock market, Richard Boyce, who on his return from the East had been elected by acclamation a member of several fashionable clubs, tried to retrieve himself at the gaming-table. Lastly, when money matters at home and abroad, when

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the anxieties of his wife and the altered manners of his acquaintance in and out of the House of Commons grew more than usually disagreeable, a certain little chorus girl came upon the scene and served to make both money and repentance scarcer even than they were before. No story could be more commonplace or more detestable.

"Ah, how well I remember that poor old fellow — old John Boyce," said Lord Maxwell, slowly, shaking his stately white head over it, as he leant talking and musing against the mantelpiece. "I saw him the day he came back from the attempt to hush up the company business. I met him in the road, and could not help pulling up to speak to him. I was so sorry for him. We had been friends for many years, he and I. 'Oh, good God!' he said, when he saw me. 'Don't stop me — don't speak to me!' And he lashed his horse up — as white as a sheet — fat, fresh-coloured man that he was in general — and was off. I never saw him again till after his death. First came the trial, and Dick Boyce got three months' imprisonment, on a minor count, while several others of the precious lot he was mixed up with came in for penal servitude. There was some technical flaw in the evidence with regard to him, and the clever lawyers they put on made the most of it; but we all thought, and society thought, that Dick was morally as bad as any of them. Then the papers got hold of the gambling debts and the woman. She made a disturbance at his club, I believe, during the trial, while he was out on bail — anyway it all came out. Two or three other people were implicated in the gambling business — men of good family. Alto-

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gether it was one of the biggest scandals I remember in my time."

The old man paused, the long frowning face sternly set. Aldous gazed at him in silence. It was certainly pretty bad — worse than he had thought.

"And the wife and child?" he said presently.

"Oh, poor things!" — said Lord Maxwell, forgetting everything for the moment but his story — "when Boyce's imprisonment was up they disappeared with him. His constituents held indignation meetings, of course. He gave up his seat, and his father allowed him a small fixed income — she had besides some little money of her own — which was secured him afterwards, I believe, on the estate during his brother's lifetime. Some of her people would have gladly persuaded her to leave him, for his behaviour towards her had been particularly odious, — and they were afraid, too, I think, that he might come to worse grief yet and make her life unbearable. But she wouldn't. And she would have no sympathy and no talk. I never saw her after the first year of their marriage, when she was a most radiant and beautiful creature. But, by all accounts of her behaviour at the time, she must be a remarkable woman. One of her family told me that she broke with all of them. She would know nobody who would not know him. Nor would she take money, though they were wretchedly poor; and Dick Boyce was not squeamish. She went off to little lodgings in the country or abroad with him without a word. At the same time, it was plain that her life was withered. She could make one great effort; but, according to my informant, she had

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no energy left for anything else — not even to take interest in her little girl — "

Aldous made a movement.

"Suppose we talk about her?" he said rather shortly.

Lord Maxwell started and recollected himself. After a pause he said, looking down under his spectacles at his grandson with an expression in which discomfort strove with humour —

"I see. You think we are beating about the bush. Perhaps we are. It is the difference between being old and being young, Aldous, my boy. Well — now then — for Miss Boyce. How much have you seen of her? — how deep has it gone? You can't wonder that I am knocked over. To bring that man amongst us! Why, the hound!" cried the old man, suddenly, "we could not even get him to come and see his father when he was dying. John had lost his memory mostly — had forgotten, anyway, to be angry — and just *craved* for Dick, for the only creature he had ever loved. With great difficulty I traced the man, and tried my utmost. No good! He came when his father no longer knew him, an hour before the end. His nerves, I understood, were delicate — not so delicate, however, as to prevent his being present at the reading of the will! I have never forgiven him that cruelty to the old man, and never will!"

And Lord Maxwell began to pace the library again, by way of working off memory and indignation.

Aldous watched him rather gloomily. They had now been discussing Boyce's criminalities in great

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detail for a considerable time, and nothing else seemed to have any power to touch — or, at any rate, to hold — Lord Maxwell's attention. A certain deep pride in Aldous — the pride of intimate affection — felt itself wounded.

"I see that you have grave cause to think badly of her father," he said at last, rising as he spoke. "I must think how it concerns me. And to-morrow you must let me tell you something about her. After all, she has done none of these things. But I ought not to keep you up like this. You will remember Clarke was very emphatic about your not exhausting yourself at night, last time he was here."

Lord Maxwell turned and stared.

"Why — why, what is the matter with you, Aldous? Offended? Well — well — There — I *am* an old fool!"

And, walking up to his grandson, he laid an affectionate and rather shaking hand on the younger's shoulder.

"You have a great charge upon you, Aldous — a charge for the future. It has upset me — I shall be calmer to-morrow. But as to any quarrel between us! Are you a youth, or am I a three-tailed bashaw? As to money, you know, I care nothing. But it goes against me, my boy, it goes against me, that *your* wife should bring such a story as that with her into this house!"

"I understand," said Aldous, wincing. "But you must see her, grandfather. Only, let me say it again — don't for one moment take it for granted that she will marry me. I never saw any one so free, so unspoilt, so unconventional."

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His eyes glowed with the pleasure of remembering her looks, her tones.

Lord Maxwell withdrew his hand and shook his head slowly.

"You have a great deal to offer. No woman, unless she were either foolish or totally unexperienced, could overlook that. Is she about twenty?"

"About twenty."

Lord Maxwell waited a moment, then, bending over the fire, shrugged his shoulders in mock despair.

"It is evident you are out of love with me, Aldous. Why, I don't know yet whether she is dark or fair!"

The conversation jarred on both sides. Aldous made an effort.

"She is very dark," he said; "like her mother in many ways, only quite different in colour. To me she seems the most beautiful — the only beautiful woman I have ever seen. I should think she was very clever in some ways — and very unformed — childish almost — in others. The Hardens say she has done everything she could — of course it isn't much — for that miserable village in the time she has been there. Oh! by the way, she is a Socialist. She thinks that all we landowners should be done away with."

Aldous looked round at his grandfather, so soon probably to be one of the lights of a Tory Cabinet, and laughed. So, to his relief, did Lord Maxwell.

"Well, don't let her fall into young Wharton's clutches, Aldous, or he will be setting her to canvas. So, she is beautiful and she is clever — and *good*, my boy? If she comes here, she will have to fill your mother's and your grandmother's place."

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Aldous tried to reply once or twice, but failed.

"If I did not feel that she were everything in herself to be loved and respected"— he said at last with some formality — "I should not long, as I do, to bring you and her together."

Silence fell again. But instinctively Aldous felt that his grandfather's mood had grown gentler — his own task easier. He seized on the moment at once.

"In the whole business," he said, half smiling, "there is only one thing clear, grandfather, and that is, that, if you will, you can do me a great service with Miss Boyce."

Lord Maxwell turned quickly and was all sharp attention, the keen commanding eyes under their fine brows absorbing, as it were, expression and life from the rest of the blanched and wrinkled face.

"You could, if you would, make matters easy for her and her mother in the county," said Aldous, anxious to carry it off lightly. "You could, if you would, without committing yourself to any personal contact with Boyce himself, make it possible for me to bring her here, so that you and my aunt might see her and judge."

The old man's expression darkened.

"What, take back that note, Aldous! I never wrote anything with greater satisfaction in my life!"

"Well, — more or less," said Aldous, quietly. "A very little would do it. A man in Richard Boyce's position will naturally not claim very much — will take what he can get."

"And you mean besides," said his grandfather, interrupting him, "that I must send your aunt to call?"

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"It will hardly be possible to ask Miss Boyce here unless she does!" said Aldous.

"And you reckon that I am not likely to go to Mellor, even to see her? And you want me to say a word to other people — to the Winterbournes and the Levens, for instance?"

"Precisely," said Aldous.

Lord Maxwell meditated; then rose.

"Let me now appease the memory of Clarke by going to bed!" (Clarke was his lordship's medical attendant and autocrat.) "I must sleep upon this, Aldous."

"I only hope I shall not have tired you out."

Aldous moved to extinguish a lamp standing on a table near.

Suddenly his grandfather called him.

"Aldous!"

"Yes."

But, as no words followed, Aldous turned. He saw his grandfather standing erect before the fire, and was startled by the emotion he instantly perceived in eye and mouth.

"You understand, Aldous, that for twenty years — it is twenty years last month since your father died — you have been the blessing of my life? Oh! don't say anything, my boy; I don't want any more agitation. I have spoken strongly; it was hardly possible but that on such a matter I should feel strongly. But don't go away misunderstanding me — don't imagine for one instant that there is anything in the world that really matters to me in comparison with your happiness and your future!"

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The venerable old man wrung the hand he held, walked quickly to the door, and shut it behind him.

An hour later, Aldous was writing in his own sitting-room, a room on the first floor, at the western corner of the house, and commanding by daylight the falling slopes of wood below the Court, and all the wide expanses of the plain. To-night, too, the blinds were up, and the great view drawn in black and pearl, streaked with white mists in the ground hollows and overarched by a wide sky holding a haloed moon, lay spread before the windows. On a clear night Aldous felt himself stifled by blinds and curtains, and would often sit late, reading and writing, with a lamp so screened that it threw light upon his book or paper, while not interfering with the full range of his eye over the night-world without. He secretly believed that human beings see far too little of the night, and so lose a host of august or beautiful impressions, which might be honestly theirs if they pleased, without borrowing or stealing from anybody, poet or painter.

The room was lined with books, partly temporary visitors from the great library downstairs, partly his old college books and prizes, and partly representing small collections for special studies. Here were a large number of volumes, blue books, and pamphlets, bearing on the condition of agriculture and the rural poor in England and abroad; there were some shelves devoted to general economics, and on a little table by the fire lay the recent numbers of various economic journals, English and foreign. Between the windows

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stood a small philosophical bookcase, the volumes of it full of small reference slips, and marked from end to end; and on the other side of the room was a revolving book-table crowded with miscellaneous volumes of poets, critics, and novelists — mainly, however, with the first two. Aldous Raeburn read few novels, and those with a certain impatience. His mind was mostly engaged in a slow wrestle with difficult and unmanageable fact; and for that transformation and illumination of fact in which the man of idealist temper must sometimes take refuge and comfort, he went easily and eagerly to the poets and to natural beauty. Hardly any novel writing, or reading, seemed to him worth while. A man, he thought, might be much better employed than in doing either.

Above the mantelpiece was his mother's picture — the picture of a young woman in a low dress and muslin scarf, trivial and empty in point of art, yet linked in Aldous's mind with a hundred touching recollections, buried all of them in the silence of an unbroken reserve. She had died in childbirth when he was nine; her baby had died with her, and her husband, Lord Maxwell's only son and surviving child, fell a victim two years later to a deadly form of throat disease, one of those ills which come upon strong men by surprise, and excite in the dying a sense of helpless wrong which even religious faith can only partially soothe.

Aldous remembered his mother's death; still more his father's, that father who could speak no last message to his son, could only lie dumb upon his pillows, with those eyes full of incommunicable pain, and the hand now restlessly seeking, now restlessly putting

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aside the small and trembling hand of the son. His boyhood had been spent under the shadow of these events, which had aged his grandfather, and made him too early realise himself as standing alone in the gap of loss, the only hope left to affection and to ambition. This premature development, amid the most melancholy surroundings, of the sense of personal importance — not in any egotistical sense, but as a sheer matter of fact — had robbed a nervous and sensitive temperament of natural stores of gaiety and elasticity which it could ill do without. Aldous Raeburn had been too much thought for and too painfully loved. But for Edward Hallin he might well have acquiesced at manhood in a certain impaired vitality, in the scholar's range of pleasures, and the landowner's customary round of duties.

It was to Edward Hallin he was writing to-night, for the stress and stir of feeling caused by the events of the day, and not least by his grandfather's outburst, seemed to put sleep far off. On the table before him stood a photograph of Hallin, besides a miniature of his mother as a girl. He had drawn the miniature closer to him, finding sympathy and joy in its youth, in the bright expectancy of the eyes, and so wrote, as it were, having both her and his friend in mind and sight.

To Hallin he had already spoken of Miss Boyce, drawing her in light, casual, and yet sympathetic strokes as the pretty girl in a difficult position whom one would watch with curiosity and some pity. To-night his letter, which should have discussed a home colonisation scheme of Hallin's, had but one topic, and his pen flew.

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"Would you call her beautiful? I ask myself again and again, trying to put myself behind your eyes. She has nothing, at any rate, in common with the beauties we have down here, or with those my aunt bade me admire in London last May. The face has a strong Italian look, but not Italian of to-day. Do you remember the Ghirlandajo frescoes in Santa Maria Novella, or the side groups in Andrea's frescoes at the Annunziata? Among them, among the beautiful tall women of them, there are, I am sure, noble, freely-poised, suggestive heads like hers — hair, black wavy hair, folded like hers in large simple lines, and faces with the same long, subtle curves. It is a face of the Renaissance, extraordinarily beautiful, as it seems to me, in colour and expression; imperfect in line, as the beauty which marks the meeting point between antique perfection and modern character must always be. It has *morbidezza* — unquiet melancholy charm, then passionate gaiety — everything that is most modern grafted on things Greek and old. I am told that Burne Jones drew her several times while she was in London, with delight. It is the most *artistic* beauty, having both the harmonies and the dissonances that a full-grown art loves.

"She may be twenty or rather more. The mind has all sorts of ability; comes to the right conclusion by a divine instinct, ignoring the how and why. What does such a being want with the drudgery of learning? to such keenness life will be master enough. Yet she has evidently read a good deal — much poetry, some scattered political economy, some modern socialistic books, Matthew Arnold, Ruskin, Carlyle. She takes everything dramatically, imaginatively, goes

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straight from it to life, and back again. Among the young people with whom she made acquaintance while she was boarding in London and working at South Kensington, there seem to have been two brothers, both artists, and both Socialists; ardent young fellows, giving all their spare time to good works, who must have influenced her a great deal. She is full of angers and revolts, which you would delight in. And first of all, she is applying herself to her father's wretched village, which will keep her hands full. A large and passionate humanity plays about her. What she says often seems to me foolish —in the ear; but the inner sense, the heart of it, command me.

"Stare as you please, Ned! Only write to me, and come down here as soon as you can. I can and will hide nothing from you, so you will believe me when I say that all is uncertain, that I know nothing, and, though I hope everything, may just as well fear everything too. But somehow I am another man, and the world shines and glows for me by day and night."

Aldous Raeburn rose from his chair and, going to the window, stood looking out at the splendour of the autumn moon. Marcella moved across the whiteness of the grass; her voice was still speaking to his inward ear. His lips smiled; his heart was in a wild whirl of happiness.

Then he walked to the table, took up his letter, read it, tore it across, and locked the fragments in a drawer.

"Not yet, Ned—not yet, dear old fellow, even to you," he said to himself, as he put out his lamp.

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CHAPTER VII.

THREE days passed. On the fourth Marcella returned late in the afternoon from a round of parish visits with Mary Harden. As she opened the oak doors which shut off the central hall of Mellor from the outer vestibule, she saw something white lying on the old cut and disused billiard table, which still occupied the middle of the floor till Richard Boyce, in the course of his economies and improvements, could replace it by a new one.

She ran forward and took up a sheaf of cards, turning them over in a smiling excitement. "Viscount Maxwell," "Mr. Raeburn," "Miss Raeburn," "Lady Winterbourne and the Misses Winterbourne," two cards of Lord Winterbourne's — all perfectly in form.

Then a thought flashed upon her. "Of course it is his doing — and I asked him!"

The cards dropped from her hand on the billiard table, and she stood looking at them, her pride fighting with her pleasure. There was something else in her feeling too — the exultation of proved power over a person not, as she guessed, easily influenced, especially by women.

"Marcella, is that you?"

It was her mother's voice. Mrs. Boyce had come in from the garden through the drawing-room, and

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was standing at the inner door of the hall, trying with shortsighted eyes to distinguish her daughter among the shadows of the great bare place. A dark day was drawing to its close, and there was little light left in the hall, except in one corner where a rainy sunset gleam struck a grim contemporary portrait of Mary Tudor, bringing out the obstinate mouth and the white hand holding a jewelled glove.

Marcella turned, and by the same gleam her mother saw her flushed and animated look.

"Any letters?" she asked.

"No; but there are some cards. Oh yes, there is a note," and she pounced upon an envelope she had overlooked. "It is for you, mother — from the Court."

Mrs. Boyce came up and took note and cards from her daughter's hand. Marcella watched her with quick breath.

Her mother looked through the cards, slowly putting them down one by one without remark.

"Oh, mother! do read the note!" Marcella could not help entreating.

Mrs. Boyce drew herself together with a quick movement as though her daughter jarred upon her, and opened the note. Marcella dared not look over her. There was a dignity about her mother's lightest action, about every movement of her slender fingers and fine fair head, which had always held the daughter in check, even while she rebelled.

Mrs. Boyce read it, and then handed it to Marcella.

"I must go and make the tea," she said, in a light, cold tone, and turning, she went back to the drawing-room, whither afternoon tea had just been carried.

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Marcella followed, reading. The note was from Miss Raeburn, and it contained an invitation to Mrs. Boyce and her daughter to take luncheon at the Court on the following Friday. The note was courteously and kindly worded. "We should be so glad," said the writer, "to show you and Miss Boyce our beautiful woods while they are still at their best, in the way of autumn colour."

"How will mamma take it?" thought Marcella anxiously. "There is not a word of papa!"

When she entered the drawing-room, she caught her mother standing absently at the tea-table. The little silver caddy was still in her hand as though she had forgotten to put it down; and her eyes, which evidently saw nothing, were turned to the window, the brows frowning. The look of suffering for an instant was unmistakable; then she started at the sound of Marcella's step, and put down the caddy amid the delicate china crowded on the tray, with all the quiet precision of her ordinary manner.

"You will have to wait for your tea," she said, "the water doesn't nearly boil."

Marcella went up to the fire and, kneeling before it, put the logs with which it was piled together. But she could not contain herself for long.

"Will you go to the Court, mamma?" she asked quickly, without turning round.

There was a pause. Then Mrs. Boyce said drily —

"Miss Raeburn's proceedings are a little unexpected. We have been here four months, within two miles of her, and it has never occurred to her to call. Now she calls and asks us to luncheon in the same after-

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noon. Either she took too little notice of us before, or she takes too much now — don't you think so?"

Marcella was silent a moment. Should she confess? It began to occur to her for the first time that in her wild independence she had been taking liberties with her mother.

"Mamma!"

"Yes."

"I asked Mr. Aldous Raeburn the other day whether everybody here was going to cut us! Papa told me that Lord Maxwell had written him an uncivil letter and —"

"You — asked — Mr. Raeburn —" said Mrs. Boyce, quickly. "What do you mean?"

Marcella turned round and met the flash of her mother's eyes.

"I couldn't help it," she said in a low hurried voice. "It seemed so horrid to feel everybody standing aloof — we were walking together — he was very kind and friendly — and I asked him to explain."

"I see!" said Mrs. Boyce. "And he went to his aunt — and she went to Lady Winterbourne — they were compassionate — and there are the cards. You have certainly taken us all in hand, Marcella!"

Marcella felt an instant's fear — fear of the ironic power in the sparkling look so keenly fixed on her offending self; she shrank before the proud reserve expressed in every line of her mother's fragile imperious beauty. Then a cry of nature broke from the girl.

"You have got used to it, mamma! I feel as if it would kill me to live here, shut off from everybody —

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joining with nobody — with no friendly feelings or society. It was bad enough in the old lodging-house days; but here — why *should* we?"

Mrs. Boyce had certainly grown pale.

"I supposed you would ask sooner or later," she said in a low determined voice, with what to Marcella was a quite new note of reality in it. "Probably Mr. Raeburn told you — but you must of course have guessed it long ago — that society does not look kindly on us — and has its reasons. I do not deny in the least that it has its reasons. I do not accuse anybody, and resent nothing. But the question with me has always been, Shall I accept pity? I have always been able to meet it with a No! You are very different from me — but for you also I believe it would be the happiest answer."

The eyes of both met — the mother's full of an indomitable fire which had for once wholly swept away her satiric calm of every day; the daughter's troubled and miserable.

"I want friends!" said Marcella, slowly. "There are so many things I want to do here, and one can do nothing if every one is against you. People would be friends with you and me — and with papa too, — through us. Some of them wish to be kind" — she added insistently, thinking of Aldous Raeburn's words and expression as he bent to her at the gate — "I know they do. And if we can't hold our heads high because — because of things in the past — ought we to be so proud that we won't take their hands when they stretch them out — when they write so kindly and nicely as this?"

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And she laid her fingers almost piteously on the note upon her knee.

Mrs. Boyce tilted the silver urn and replenished the tea-pot. Then with a delicate handkerchief she rubbed away a spot from the handle of a spoon near her.

"You shall go," she said presently — "you wish it — then go — go by all means. I will write to Miss Raeburn and send you over in the carriage. One can put a great deal on health — mine is quite serviceable in the way of excuses. I will try and do you no harm, Marcella. If you have chosen your line and wish to make friends here — very well — I will do what I can for you so long as you do not expect me to change my life — for which, my dear, I am grown too crotchety and too old."

Marcella looked at her with dismay and a yearning she had never felt before.

"And you will never go out with me, mamma?"

There was something childlike and touching in the voice, something which for once suggested the normal filial relation. But Mrs. Boyce did not waver. She had long learnt perhaps to regard Marcella as a girl singularly well able to take care of herself; and had recognised the fact with relief.

"I will not go to the Court with you anyway," she said, daintily sipping her tea — "in your interests as well as mine. You will make all the greater impression, my dear, for I have really forgotten how to behave. Those cards shall be properly returned, of course. For the rest — let no one disturb themselves till they must. And if I were you, Marcella, I would hardly

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discuss the family affairs any more — with Mr. Raeburn or anybody else."

And again her keen glance disconcerted the tall handsome girl, whose power over the world about her had never extended to her mother. Marcella flushed and played with the fire.

"You see, mamma," she said after a moment, still looking at the logs and the shower of sparks they made as she moved them about, "you never let me discuss them with you."

"Heaven forbid!" said Mrs. Boyce, quickly; then, after a pause: "You will find your own line in a little while, Marcella, and you will see, if you so choose it, that there will be nothing unsurmountable in your way. One piece of advice let me give you. Don't be too *grateful* to Miss Raeburn, or anybody else! You take great interest in your Boyce belongings, I perceive. You may remember too, perhaps, that there is other blood in you — and that no Merritt has ever submitted quietly to either patronage or pity."

Marcella started. Her mother had never named her own kindred to her before that she could remember. She had known for many years that there was a breach between the Merritts and themselves. The newspapers had told her something at intervals of her Merritt relations, for they were fashionable and important folk, but no one of them had crossed the Boyces' threshold since the old London days, wherein Marcella could still dimly remember the tall forms of certain Merritt uncles, and even a stately lady in a white cap whom she knew to have been her mother's mother. The stately lady had died while she was still a child at

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her first school; she could recollect her own mourning frock; but that was almost the last personal remembrance she had, connected with the Merritts.

And now this note of intense personal and family pride, under which Mrs. Boyce's voice had for the first time quivered a little! Marcella had never heard it before, and it thrilled her. She sat on by the fire, drinking her tea and every now and then watching her companion with a new and painful curiosity. The tacit assumption of many years with her had been that her mother was a dry limited person, clever and determined in small ways, that affected her own family, but on the whole characterless as compared with other people of strong feelings and responsive susceptibilities. But her own character had been rapidly maturing of late, and her insight sharpening. During these recent weeks of close contact, her mother's singularity had risen in her mind to the dignity at least of a problem, an enigma.

Presently Mrs. Boyce rose and put the scones down by the fire.

"Your father will be in, I suppose. Yes, I hear the front door."

As she spoke she took off her velvet cloak, put it carefully aside on a sofa, and sat down again, still in her bonnet, at the tea-table. Her dress was very different from Marcella's, which, when they were not in mourning, was in general of the ample "æsthetic" type, and gave her a good deal of trouble out of doors. Marcella wore "art serges" and velveteens; Mrs. Boyce attired herself in soft and costly silks, generally black, closely and fashionably made, and completed by

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various fanciful and distinguished trifles — rings, an old chatelaine, a diamond brooch — which Marcella remembered, the same, and worn in the same way, since her childhood. Mrs. Boyce, however, wore her clothes so daintily, and took such scrupulous and ingenious care of them, that her dress cost, in truth, extremely little — certainly less than Marcella's.

There were sounds first of footsteps in the hall, then of some scolding of William, and finally Mr. Boyce entered, tired and splashed from shooting, and evidently in a bad temper.

"Well, what are you going to do about those cards?" he asked his wife abruptly when she had supplied him with tea, and he was beginning to dry by the fire. He was feeling ill and reckless; too tired anyway to trouble himself to keep up appearances with Marcella.

"Return them," said Mrs. Boyce, calmly, blowing out the flame of her silver kettle.

"*I* don't want any of their precious society," he said irritably. "They should have done their calling long ago. There's no grace in it now; I don't know that one isn't inclined to think it an intrusion."

But the women were silent. Marcella's attention was diverted from her mother to the father's small dark head and thin face. There was a great repulsion and impatience in her heart, an angry straining against circumstance and fate; yet at the same time a mounting voice of natural affection, an understanding at once sad and new, which paralysed and silenced her. He stood in her way — terribly in her way — and yet it strangely seemed to her, that never before till these last few weeks had she felt herself a daughter.

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"You are very wet, papa," she said to him as she took his cup; "don't you think you had better go at once and change?"

"I'm all right," he said shortly — "as right as I'm likely to be, anyway. As for the shooting, it's nothing but waste of time and shoe leather. I shan't go out any more. The place has been clean swept by some of those brutes in the village — your friends, Marcella. By the way, Evelyn, I came across young Wharton in the road just now."

"Wharton?" said his wife, interrogatively. "I don't remember — ought I?"

"Why, the Liberal candidate for the division, of course," he said testily. "I wish you would inform yourself of what goes on. He is working like a horse, he tells me. Dodgson, the Raeburns' candidate, has got a great start; this young man will want all his time to catch him up. I like him. I won't vote for him; but I'll see fair play. I've asked him to come to tea here on Saturday, Evelyn. He'll be back again by the end of the week. He stays at Dell's farm when he comes — pretty bad accommodation, I should think. We must show him some civility."

He rose and stood with his back to the fire, his spare frame stiffening under his nervous determination to assert himself — to hold up his head physically and morally against those who would repress him.

Richard Boyce took his social punishment badly. He had passed his first weeks at Mellor in a tremble of desire that his father's old family and country friends should recognise him again and condone his

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"irregularities." All sorts of conciliatory ideas had passed through his head. He meant to let people see that he would be a good neighbour if they would give him the chance — not like that miserly fool, his brother Robert. The past was so much past; who now was more respectable or more well intentioned than he? He was an impressionable imaginative man in delicate health; and the tears sometimes came into his eyes as he pictured himself restored to society — partly by his own efforts, partly, no doubt, by the charms and good looks of his wife and daughter — forgiven for their sake, and for the sake also of that store of virtue he had so laboriously accumulated since that long-past catastrophe. Would not most men have gone to the bad altogether, after such a lapse? He, on the contrary, had recovered himself, had neither drunk nor squandered, nor deserted his wife and child. These things, if the truth were known, were indeed due rather to a certain lack of physical energy and vitality, which age had developed in him, than to self-conquest; but he was no doubt entitled to make the most of them. There were signs indeed that his forecast had been not at all unreasonable. His womenkind *were* making their way. At the very moment when Lord Maxwell had written him a quelling letter, he had become aware that Marcella was on good terms with Lord Maxwell's heir. Had he not also been stopped that morning in a remote lane by Lord Winterbourne and Lord Maxwell on their way back from the meet, and had not both recognised and shaken hands with him? And now there were these cards.

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Unfortunately, in spite of Raeburn's opinion to the contrary, no man in such a position and with such a temperament ever gets something without claiming more — and more than he can conceivably or possibly get. Startled and pleased at first by the salutation which Lord Maxwell and his companion had bestowed upon him, Richard Boyce had passed his afternoon in resenting and brooding over the cold civility of it. So these were the terms he was to be on with them — the deuce take them and their pharisaical airs! If all the truth were known, most men would look foolish; and the men who thanked God that they were not as other men, soonest of all. He wished he had not been taken by surprise; he wished he had not answered them; he would show them in the future that he would eat no dirt for them or anybody else.

So on the way home there had been a particular zest in his chance encounter with the young man who was likely to give the Raeburns and their candidate — so all the world said — a very great deal of trouble. The seat had been held to be an entirely safe one for the Maxwell nominee. Young Wharton, on the contrary, was making way every day, and, what with securing Aldous's own seat in the next division, and helping old Dodgson in this, Lord Maxwell and his grandson had their hands full. Dick Boyce was glad of it. He was a Tory; but all the same he wished every success to this handsome, agreeable young man, whose deferential manners to him at the end of the day had come like ointment to a wound.

The three sat on together for a little while in silence. Marcella kept her seat by the fire on the old gilt fender-

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stool, conscious in a dreamlike way of the room in front of her — the stately room with its stucco ceiling, its tall windows, its Prussian-blue wall-paper behind the old cabinets and faded pictures, and the chair covers in Turkey-red twill against the blue, which still remained to bear witness at once to the domestic economies and the decorative ideas of old Robert Boyce — conscious also of the figures on either side of her, and of her own quick-beating youth betwixt them. She was sore and unhappy; yet, on the whole, what she was thinking most about was Aldous Raeburn. What had he said to Lord Maxwell? — and to the Winterbournes? She wished she could know. She wished with leaping pulse that she could see him again quickly. Yet it would be awkward too.

Presently she got up and went away to take off her things. As the door closed behind her, Mrs. Boyce held out Miss Raeburn's note, which Marcella had returned to her, to her husband.

"They have asked Marcella and me to lunch," she said. "I am not going, but I shall send her."

He read the note by the firelight, and it produced the most contradictory effects upon him.

"Why don't you go?" he asked her aggressively, rousing himself for a moment to attack her, and so vent some of his ill-humour.

"I have lost the habit of going out," she said quietly, "and am too old to begin again."

"What! you mean to say," he asked her angrily, raising his voice, "that you have never *meant* to do your duties here — the duties of your position?"

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"I did not foresee many, outside this house and land. Why should we change our ways? We have done very well of late. I have no mind to risk what I have got."

He glanced round at her in a quick nervous way, and then looked back again at the fire. The sight of her delicate blanched face had in some respects a more and more poignant power with him as the years went on. His anger sank into moroseness.

"Then why do you let Marcella go? What good will it do her to go about without her parents? People will only despise her for a girl of no spirit — as they ought."

"It depends upon how it is done. I can arrange it, I think," said Mrs. Boyce. "A woman has always convenient limitations to plead in the way of health. She need never give offence if she has decent wits. It will be understood that I do not go out, and then some one — Miss Raeburn or Lady Winterbourne — will take up Marcella and mother her."

She spoke with her usual light gentleness, but he was not appeased.

"If you were to talk of *my* health, it would be more to the purpose," he said, with grim inconsequence. And raising his heavy lids he looked at her full.

She got up and went over to him.

"Do you feel worse again? Why will you not change your things directly you come in? Would you like Dr. Clarke sent for?"

She was standing close beside him; her beautiful hand, for which in their young days it had pleased his

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pride to give her rings, almost touched him. A passionate hunger leapt within him. She would stoop and kiss him if he asked her; he knew that. But he would not ask her; he did not want it; he wanted something that never on this earth would she give him again.

Then moral discomfort lost itself in physical.

"Clarke does me no good — not an atom," he said, rising. "There — don't you come. I can look after myself."

He went, and Mrs. Boyce remained alone in the great fire-lit room. She put her hands on the mantelpiece, and dropped her head upon them, and so stood silent for long. There was no sound audible in the room, or from the house outside. And in the silence a proud and broken heart once more nerved itself to an endurance that brought it peace with neither man nor God.

"I shall go, for all our sakes," thought Marcella, as she stood late that night brushing her hair before her dimly-lighted and rickety dressing-table. "We have, it seems, no right to be proud."

A rush of pain and bitterness filled her heart — pain, new-born and insistent, for her mother, her father, and herself. Ever since Aldous Raeburn's hesitating revelations, she had been liable to this sudden invasion of a hot and shamed misery. And to-night, after her talk with her mother, it could not but overtake her afresh.

But her strong personality, her passionate sense of a moral independence not to be undone by the acts of

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another, even a father, made her soon impatient of her own distress, and she flung it from her with decision.

"No, we have no right to be proud," she repeated to herself. "It must be all true what Mr. Raeburn said — probably a great deal more. Poor, poor mamma! But, all the same, there is nothing to be got out of empty quarrelling and standing alone. And it was so long ago."

Her hand fell, and she stood absently looking at her own black and white reflection in the old flawed glass.

She was thinking, of course, of Mr. Raeburn. He had been very prompt in her service. There could be no question but that he was specially interested in her.

And he was not a man to be lightly played upon — nay, rather a singularly reserved and scrupulous person. So, at least, it had been always held concerning him. Marcella was triumphantly conscious that he had not from the beginning given *her* much trouble. But the common report of him made his recent manner towards her, this last action of his, the more significant. Even the Hardens — so Marcella gathered from her friend and admirer Mary — unworldly dreamy folk, wrapt up in good works, and in the hastening of Christ's kingdom, were on the alert and beginning to take note.

It was not as though he were in the dark as to her antecedents. He knew all — at any rate, more than she did — and yet it might end in his asking her to marry him. What then?

Scarcely a quiver in the young form before the

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glass! *Love*, at such a thought, must have sunk upon its knees and hid its face for tender humbleness and requital. Marcella only looked quietly at the beauty which might easily prove to be so important an arrow in her quiver.

What was stirring in her was really a passionate ambition — ambition to be the queen and arbitress of human lives — to be believed in by her friends, to make a mark for herself among women, and to make it in the most romantic and yet natural way, without what had always seemed to her the sordid and unpleasant drudgeries of the platform, of a tiresome co-operation with, or subordination to others who could not understand your ideas.

Of course, if it happened, people would say that she had tried to capture Aldous Raeburn for his money and position's sake. Let them say it. People with base minds must think basely; there was no help for it. Those whom she would make her friends would know very well for what purpose she wanted money, power, and the support of such a man, and such a marriage. Her modern realism played with the thought quite freely; her maidenliness, proud and pure as it was, being nowise ashamed. Oh! for something to carry her *deep* into life; into the heart of its widest and most splendid opportunities!

She threw up her hands, clasping them above her head amid her clouds of curly hair — a girlish excited gesture.

"I could revive the straw-plaiting; give them better teaching and better models. The cottages should be rebuilt. Papa would willingly hand the village over

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to me if I found the money! We would have a parish committee to deal with the charities—oh! the Hardens would come in. The old people should have their pensions as of right. No hopeless old age, no cringing dependence! We would try co-operation on the land, and pull it through. And not in Mellor only. One might be the ruler, the regenerator of half a county!"

Memory brought to mind in vivid sequence the figures and incidents of the afternoon, of her village round with Mary Harden.

"*As the eyes of servants towards the hand of their mistress*"—the old words occurred to her as she thought of herself stepping in and out of the cottages. Then she was ashamed of herself and rejected the image with vehemence. Dependence was the curse of the poor. Her whole aim, of course, should be to teach them to stand on their own feet, to know themselves as men. But naturally they would be grateful, they would let themselves be led. Intelligence and enthusiasm give power, and ought to give it—power for good. No doubt, under Socialism, there will be less scope for either, because there will be less need. But Socialism, as a system, will not come in our generation. What we have to think for is the transition period. The Cravens had never seen that, but Marcella saw it. She began to feel herself a person of larger experience than they.

As she undressed, it seemed to her as though she still felt the clinging hands of the Hurd children round her knees, and through them, symbolised by them, the suppliant touch of hundreds of other helpless creatures.

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She was just dropping to sleep when her own words to Aldous Raeburn flashed across her, —

"Everybody is so ready to take charge of other people's lives, and look at the result!"

She must needs laugh at herself, but it made little matter. She fell asleep cradled in dreams. Aldous Raeburn's final part in them was not great!

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CHAPTER VIII.

Mrs. Boyce wrote her note to Miss Raeburn, a note containing cold though civil excuses as to herself, while accepting the invitation for Marcella, who should be sent to the Court, either in the carriage or under the escort of a maid who could bring her back. Marcella found her mother inclined to insist punctiliously on conventions of this kind. It amused her, in submitting to them, to remember the free and easy ways of her London life. But she submitted — and not unwillingly.

On the afternoon of the day which intervened between the Maxwells' call and her introduction to the Court, Marcella walked as usual down to the village. She was teeming with plans for her new kingdom, and could not keep herself out of it. And an entry in one of the local papers had suggested to her that Hurd might possibly find work in a parish some miles from Mellor. She must go and send him off there.

When Mrs. Hurd opened the door to her, Marcella was astonished to perceive behind her the forms of several other persons filling up the narrow space of the usually solitary cottage — in fact, a tea-party.

"Oh, come in, miss," said Mrs. Hurd, with some embarrassment, as though it occurred to her that her visitor might legitimately wonder to find a person of

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her penury entertaining company. Then, lowering her voice, she hurriedly explained: "There's Mrs. Brunt come in this afternoon to help me wi' the washin' while I finished my score of plait for the woman who takes 'em into town to-morrow. And there's old Patton an' his wife — you know 'em, miss? — them as lives in the parish houses top o' the common. He's walked out a few steps to-day. It's not often he's able, and when I see him through the door I said to 'em, 'if you'll come in an' take a cheer, I dessay them tea-leaves 'ull stan' another wettin'. I haven't got nothink else.' And there's Mrs. Jellison, she came in along o' the Pattons. You can't say her no, she's a queer one. Do you know her, miss?"

"Oh, bless yer, yes, yes. She knows me!" said a high, jocular voice, making Mrs. Hurd start; "she couldn't be long hereabouts without makkin' eëaste to know me. You coom in, miss. We're not afraid o' you — Lor' bless you!"

Mrs. Hurd stood aside for her visitor to pass in, looking round her the while, in some perplexity, to see whether there was a spare chair and room to place it. She was a delicate, willowy woman, still young in figure, with a fresh colour, belied by the grey circles under the eyes and the pinched sharpness of the features. The upper lip, which was pretty and childish, was raised a little over the teeth; the whole expression of the slightly open mouth was unusually soft and sensitive. On the whole, Minta Hurd was liked in the village, though she was thought a trifle "fine." The whole family, indeed, "kept theirsels to theirsels," and to find Mrs. Hurd with company was

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unusual. Her name, of course, was short for Araminta.

Marcella laughed as she caught Mrs. Jellison's remarks, and made her way in, delighted. For the present, these village people affected her like figures in poetry or drama. She saw them with the eye of the imagination through a medium provided by Socialist discussion, or by certain phases of modern art; and the little scene of Mrs. Hurd's tea-party took for her in an instant the dramatic zest and glamour.

"Look here, Mrs. Jellison," she said, going up to her; "I was just going to leave these apples for your grandson. Perhaps you'll take them, now you're here. They're quite sweet, though they look green. They're the best we've got, the gardener says."

"Oh, they are, are they?" said Mrs. Jellison, composedly, looking up at her. "Well, put 'em down, miss. I dare say he'll eat 'em. He eats most things, and don't want no doctor's stuff nayther, though his mother do keep on at me for spoilin' his stummuck."

"You are just fond of that boy, aren't you, Mrs. Jellison?" said Marcella, taking a wooden stool, the only piece of furniture left in the tiny cottage on which it was possible to sit, and squeezing herself into a corner by the fire, whence she commanded the whole group. "No! don't you turn Mr. Patton out of that chair, Mrs. Hurd, or I shall have to go away."

For Mrs. Hurd, in her anxiety, was whispering in old Patton's ear that it might be well for him to give up her one wooden arm-chair, in which he was established, to Miss Boyce. But he, being old, deaf, and

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rheumatic, was slow to move, and Marcella's peremptory gesture bade her leave him in peace.

"Well, it's you that's the young 'un, ain't it, miss?" said Mrs. Jellison, cheerfully. "Poor old Patton, he do get slow on his legs, don't you, Patton? But there, there's no helping it when you're turned of eighty."

And she turned upon him a bright, philosophic eye, being herself a young thing not much over seventy, and energetic accordingly. Mrs. Jellison passed for the village wit, and was at least talkative and excitable beyond her fellows.

"Well, *you* don't seem to mind getting old, Mrs. Jellison," said Marcella, smiling at her.

The eyes of all the old people round their tea-table were by now drawn irresistibly to Miss Boyce in the chimney corner, to her slim grace, and the splendour of her large black hat and feathers. The new squire's daughter had so far taken them by surprise. Some of them, however, were by now in the second stage of critical observation — none the less critical because furtive and inarticulate.

"Ah?" said Mrs. Jellison, interrogatively, with a high, long-drawn note peculiar to her. "Well, I've never found you get forrarder wi' snarlin' over what you can't help. And there's mercies. When you've had a husband in his bed for fower year, miss, and he's took at last, you'll *know*."

She nodded emphatically. Marcella laughed.

"I know you were very fond of him, Mrs. Jellison, and looked after him very well, too."

"Oh, I don't say nothin' about that," said Mrs. Jellison, hastily. "But all the same you kin reckon it

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up, and see for yoursen. Fower year — an' fire upstairs, an' fire downstairs, an' fire all night, an' soomthin' allus wanted. An' he such an objeck afore he died! It do seem like a holiday now to sit a bit."

And she crossed her hands on her lap with a long breath of content. A lock of grey hair had escaped from her bonnet, across her wrinkled forehead, and gave her a half-careless rakish air. Her youth of long ago — a youth of mad spirits, and of an extraordinary capacity for physical enjoyment, seemed at times to pierce to the surface again, even through her load of years. But in general she had a dreamy, sunny look, as of one fed with humorous fancies, but disinclined often to the trouble of communicating them.

"Well, I missed my daughter, I kin tell you," said Mrs. Brunt, with a sigh, "though she took a deal more lookin' after nor your good man, Mrs. Jellison."

Mrs. Brunt was a gentle, pretty old woman, who lived in another of the village almshouses, next door to the Pattons, and was always ready to help her neighbours in their domestic toils. Her last remaining daughter, the victim of a horrible spinal disease, had died some nine or ten months before the Boyces arrived at Mellor. Marcella had already heard the story several times, but it was part of her social gift that she was a good listener to such things even at the twentieth hearing.

"You wouldn't have her back though," she said gently, turning towards the speaker.

"No, I wouldn't have her back, miss," said Mrs. Brunt, raising her hand to brush away a tear, partly

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the result of feeling, partly of a long-established habit. "But I do miss her nights terrible! 'Mother, ain't it ten o'clock? — mother, look at the clock, do, mother — ain't it time for my stuff, mother — oh, I do *hope* it is.' That was her stuff, miss, to make her sleep. And when she'd got it, she'd *groan* — you'd think she couldn't be asleep, and yet she was, dead-like — for two hours. I didn't get no rest with her, and now I don't seem to get no rest without her."

And again Mrs. Brunt put her hand up to her eyes.

"Ah, you were allus one for toilin' an' frettin'," said Mrs. Jellison, calmly. "A body must get through wi' it when it's there, but I don't hold wi' thinkin' about it when it's done."

"I know one," said old Patton, slily, "that fretted about *her* darter when it didn't do her no good."

He had not spoken so far, but had sat with his hands on his stick, a spectator of the women's humours. He was a little hunched man, twisted and bent double with rheumatic gout, the fruit of seventy years of field work. His small face was almost lost, dog-like, under shaggy hair and overgrown eyebrows, both snow-white. He had a look of irritable eagerness, seldom, however, expressed in words. A sudden passion in the faded blue eyes; a quick spot of red in his old cheeks; these Marcella had often noticed in him, as though the flame of some inner furnace leapt. He had been a Radical and a rebel once in old rick-burning days, long before he lost the power in his limbs and came down to be thankful for one of the parish almshouses. To his social betters he was now a quiet and peaceable old man, well aware of the

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cakes and ale to be got by good manners; but in the depths of him there were reminiscences and the ghosts of passions, which were still stirred sometimes by causes not always intelligible to the bystander.

He had rarely, however, physical energy enough to bring any emotion — even of mere worry at his physical ills — to the birth. The pathetic silence of age enwrapped him more and more. Still he could gibe the women sometimes, especially Mrs. Jellison, who was in general too clever for her company.

"Oh, you may talk, Patton!" said Mrs. Jellison, with a little flash of excitement. "You do like to have your talk, don't you! Well, I dare say I *was* orkard with Isabella. I won't go for to say I *wasn't* orkard, for I *was*. She should ha' used me to 't before, if she wor took that way. She and I had just settled down comfortable after my old man went, and I didn't see no sense in it, an' I don't now. She might ha' let the men alone. She'd seen enough o' the worrit ov 'em."

"Well, she did well for hersen," said Mrs. Brunt, with the same gentle melancholy. "She married a stiddy man as 'ull keep her well all her time, and never let her want for nothink."

"A sour, wooden-faced chap as iver I knew," said Mrs. Jellison, grudgingly. "I don't have nothink to say to him, nor he to me. He thinks hissen the Grand Turk, he do, since they gi'en him his uniform, and made him full keeper. A nassty, domineerin' sort, I calls him. He's allus makin' bad blood wi' the yoong fellers when he don't need. It's the way he's got wi' 'im. But *I* don't make no account of 'im, an' I let 'im see 't."

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All the tea-party grinned except Mrs. Hurd. The village was well acquainted with the feud between Mrs. Jellison and her son-in-law, George Westall, who had persuaded Isabella Jellison at the mature age of thirty-five to leave her mother and marry him, and was now one of Lord Maxwell's keepers, with good pay, and an excellent cottage some little way out of the village. Mrs. Jellison had never forgiven her daughter for deserting her, and was on lively terms of hostility with her son-in-law; but their only child, little Johnnie, had found the soft spot in his grandmother, and her favourite excitement in life, now that he was four years old, was to steal him from his parents and feed him on the things of which Isabella most vigorously disapproved.

Mrs. Hurd, as has been said, did not smile. At the mention of Westall, she got up hastily, and began to put away the tea things.

Marcella meanwhile had been sitting thoughtful.

"You say Westall makes bad blood with the young men, Mrs. Jellison?" she said, looking up. "Is there much poaching in this village now, do you think?"

There was a dead silence. Mrs. Hurd was at the other end of the cottage with her back to Marcella; at the question, her hands paused an instant in their work. The eyes of all the old people — of Patton and his wife, of Mrs. Jellison, and pretty Mrs. Brunt — were fixed on the speaker, but nobody said a word, not even Mrs. Jellison. Marcella coloured.

"Oh, you needn't suppose —" she said, throwing her beautiful head back, "you needn't suppose that *I* care about the game, or that I would ever be mean

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enough to tell anything that was told me. I know it *does* cause a great deal of quarrelling and bad blood. I believe it does here — and I should like to know more about it. I want to make up my mind what to think. Of course, my father has got his land and his own opinions. And Lord Maxwell has too. But I am not bound to think like either of them — I should like you to understand that. It seems to me right about all such things that people should enquire and find out for themselves."

Still silence. Mrs. Jellison's mouth twitched, and she threw a sly provocative glance at old Patton, as though she would have liked to poke him in the ribs. But she was not going to help him out; and at last the one male in the company found himself obliged to clear his throat for reply.

"We're old folks, most on us, miss, 'cept Mrs. Hurd. We don't hear talk o' things now like as we did when we were younger. If you ast Mr. Harden he'll tell you, I dessay."

Patton allowed himself an inward chuckle. Even Mrs. Jellison, he thought, must admit that he knew a thing or two as to the best way of dealing with the gentry.

But Marcella fixed him with her bright frank eyes.

"I had rather ask in the village," she said. "If you don't know how it is now, Mr. Patton, tell me how it used to be when you were young. Was the preserving very strict about here? Were there often fights with the keepers — long ago? — in my grandfather's days? — and do you think men poached because they were hungry, or because they wanted sport?"

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Patton looked at her fixedly a moment undecided, then her strong nervous youth seemed to exercise a kind of compulsion on him; perhaps, too, the pretty courtesy of her manner. He cleared his throat again, and tried to forget Mrs. Jellison, who would be sure to let him hear of it again, whatever he said.

"Well, I can't answer for 'em, miss, I'm sure, but if you ast *me*, I b'lieve ther's a bit o' boath in it. Yer see it's not in human natur, when a man's young and 's got his blood up, as he shouldn't want ter have 'is sport with the wild creeturs. Perhaps he see 'em when ee's going to the wood with a wood cart — or he cooms across 'em in the turnips — wounded birds, you understan', miss, perhaps the day after the gentry 'as been bangin' at 'em all day. An' ee don't see, not for the life of 'im, why ee shouldn't have 'em. Ther's bin lots an' lots for the rich folks, an' he don't see why *ee* shouldn't have a few arter they've enjoyed theirselves. And mebbe he's eleven shillin' a week — an' two-threy little chillen — you understan', miss?"

"Of course I understand!" said Marcella, eagerly, her dark cheek flushing. "Of course I do! But there's a good deal of game given away in these parts, isn't there? I know Lord Maxwell does, and they say Lord Winterbourne gives all his labourers rabbits, almost as many as they want."

Her questions wound old Patton up as though he had been a disused clock. He began to feel a whirr among his creaking wheels, a shaking of all his rusty mind.

"Perhaps they do, miss," he said, and his wife saw that he was beginning to tremble. "I dessay they

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do — I don't say nothink agen it — though theer's none of it cooms my way. But that isn't all the rights on it nayther — no, that it ain't. The labourin' man ee's glad enough to get a hare or a rabbit for 'is eatin' — but there's more in it nor that, miss. Ee's allus in the fields, that's where it is — ee can't help seein' the hares and the rabbits a-comin' in and out o' the woods, if it were iver so. Ee knows ivery run ov ivery one on 'em; if a hare's started furthest corner o' t' field, he can tell yer whar she'll git in by, because he's allus there, you see, miss, an' it's the only thing he's got to take his mind off like. And then he sets a snare or two — an' ee gits very sharp at settin' on 'em — an' ee'll go out nights for the sport of it. Ther isn't many things *ee's* got to liven him up; an' ee takes 'is chances o' goin' to jail — it's wuth it, ee thinks."

The old man's hands on his stick shook more and more visibly. Bygones of his youth had come back to him.

"Oh, I know! I know!" cried Marcella, with an accent half of indignation, half of despair. "It's the whole wretched system. It spoils those who've got, and those who haven't got. And there'll be no mending it till the *people* get the land back again, and till the rights on it are common to all."

"My! she do speak up, don't she?" said Mrs. Jellison, grinning again at her companions. Then, stooping forward with one of her wild movements, she caught Marcella's arm — "I'd like to hear yer tell that to Lord Maxwell, miss. I likes a roompus, I do."

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Marcella flushed and laughed.

"I wouldn't mind saying that or anything else to Lord Maxwell," she said proudly. "I'm not ashamed of anything I think."

"No, I'll bet you ain't," said Mrs. Jellison, withdrawing her hand. "Now then, Patton, you say what *you* thinks. You ain't got no vote now you're in the parish houses — I minds that. The quality don't trouble *you* at 'lection times. This yoong man, Muster Wharton, as is goin' round so free, promisin' yer the sun out o' the sky, iv yer'll only vote for 'im, so th' men say — *ee* don't coom an' set down along o' you an' me, an' cocker of us up as ee do Joe Simmons or Jim Hurd here. But that don't matter. Yur thinkin's yur own, anyway."

But she nudged him in vain. Patton had suddenly run down, and there was no more to be got out of him.

Not only had nerves and speech failed him as they were wont, but in his cloudy soul there had risen, even while Marcella was speaking, the inevitable suspicion which dogs the relations of the poor towards the richer class. This young lady, with her strange talk, was the new squire's daughter. And the village had already made up its mind that Richard Boyce was "a poor sort," and "a hard sort" too, in his landlord capacity. He wasn't going to be any improvement on his brother — not a haporth! What was the good of this young woman talking, as she did, when there were three summonses as he, Patton, heard tell, just taken out by the sanitary inspector against Mr. Boyce for bad cottages? And not a farthing given away

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in the village neither, except perhaps the bits of food that the young lady herself brought down to the village now and then, for which no one, in truth, felt any cause to be particularly grateful. Besides, what did she mean by asking questions about the poaching? Old Patton knew as well as anybody else in the village, that during Robert Boyce's last days, and after the death of his sportsman son, the Mellor estate had become the haunt of poachers from far and near, and that the trouble had long since spread into the neighbouring properties, so that the Winterbourne and Maxwell keepers regarded it their most arduous business to keep watch on the men of Mellor. Of course the young woman knew it all, and she and her father wanted to know more. That was why she talked. Patton hardened himself against the creeping ways of the quality.

"I don't think nought," he said roughly in answer to Mrs. Jellison. "Thinkin' won't come atwixt me and the parish coffin when I'm took. I've no call to think, I tell yer."

Marcella's chest heaved with indignant feeling.

"Oh, but, Mr. Patton!" she cried, leaning forward to him, "won't it comfort you a bit, even if you can't live to see it, to think there's a better time coming? There must be. People can't go on like this always — hating each other and trampling on each other. They're beginning to see it now, they are! When I was living in London, the persons I was with talked and thought of it all day. Some day, whenever the people choose — for they've got the power now they've got the vote — there'll be land for everybody, and in

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every village there'll be a council to manage things, and the labourer will count for just as much as the squire and the parson, and he'll be better educated and better fed, and care for many things he doesn't care for now. But all the same, if he wants sport and shooting, it will be there for him to get. For everybody will have a chance and a turn, and there'll be no bitterness between classes, and no hopeless pining and misery as there is now!"

The girl broke off, catching her breath. It excited her to say these things to these people, to these poor tottering old things who had lived out their lives to the end under the pressure of an iron system, and had no lien on the future, whatever Paradise it might bring. Again the situation had something foreseen and dramatic in it. She saw herself, as the preacher, sitting on her stool beside the poor grate — she realised as a spectator the figures of the women and the old man played on by the firelight — the white, bare, damp-stained walls of the cottage, and in the background the fragile though still comely form of Minta Hurd, who was standing with her back to the dresser, and her head bent forward, listening to the talk while her fingers twisted the straw she plaited eternally from morning till night, for a wage of about 1*s.* 3*d.* a week.

Her mind was all aflame with excitement and defiance — defiance of her father, Lord Maxwell, Aldous Raeburn. Let him come, her friend, and see for himself what she thought it right to do and say in this miserable village. Her soul challenged him, longed to provoke him! Well, she was soon to meet him,

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and in a new and more significant relation and environment. The fact made her perception of the whole situation the more rich and vibrant.

Patton, while these broken thoughts and sensations were coursing through Marcella's head, was slowly revolving what she had been saying, and the others were waiting for him.

At last he rolled his tongue round his dry lips and delivered himself by a final effort.

"Them as likes, miss, may believe as how things are going to happen that way, but yer won't ketch me! Them as have got 'ull *keep*" — he let his stick sharply down on the floor — "an' them as 'aven't got 'ull 'ave to go without and *lump it* — as long as you're alive, miss, you mark my words!"

"Oh, Lor', you wor allus one for makin' a poor mouth, Patton!" said Mrs. Jellison. She had been sitting with her arms folded across her chest, part absent, part amused, part malicious. "The young lady speaks beautiful, just like a book she do. An' she's likely to know a deal better nor poor persons like you and me. All *I* kin say is, — if there's goin' to be dividin' up of other folks' property, when I'm gone, I hope George Westall won't get nothink ov it! He's bad enough as 'tis. Isabella 'ud have a fine time if *ee* took to drivin' ov his carriage."

The others laughed out, Marcella at their head, and Mrs. Jellison subsided, the corners of her mouth still twitching, and her eyes shining as though a host of entertaining notions were trooping through her — which, however, she preferred to amuse herself with rather than the public. Marcella looked at Patton thoughtfully.

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"You've been all your life in this village, haven't you, Mr. Patton?" she asked him.

"Born top o' Witchett's Hill, miss. An' my wife here, she wor born just a house or two further along, an' we two bin married sixty-one year come next March."

He had resumed his usual almshouse tone, civil and a little plaintive. His wife behind him smiled gently at being spoken of. She had a long fair face, and white hair surmounted by a battered black bonnet, a mouth set rather on one side, and a more observant and refined air than most of her neighbours. She sighed while she talked, and spoke in a delicate quaver.

"D'ye know, miss," said Mrs. Jellison, pointing to Mrs. Patton, "as she kep' school when she was young?"

"Did you, Mrs. Patton?" asked Marcella in her tone of sympathetic interest. "The school wasn't very big then, I suppose?"

"About forty, miss," said Mrs. Patton, with a sigh. "There was eighteen the Rector paid for, and eighteen Mr. Boyce paid for, and the rest paid for themselves."

Her voice dropped gently, and she sighed again like one weighted with an eternal fatigue.

"And what did you teach them?"

"Well, I taught them the plaitin', miss, and as much readin' and writin' as I knew myself. It wasn't as high as it is now, you see, miss," and a delicate flush dawned on the old cheek as Mrs. Patton threw a glance round her companions as though appealing to them not to tell stories of her.

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But Mrs. Jellison was implacable. "It wor she taught *me*," she said, nodding at Marcella and pointing sideways to Mrs. Patton. "She had a queer way wi' the hard words, I can tell yer, miss. When she couldn't tell 'em herself she'd never own up to it. 'Say Jerusalem, my dear, and pass on.' That's what she'd say, she would, sure's as you're alive! I've heard her do it times. An' when Isabella an' me used to read the Bible, nights, I'd allus rayther do 't than be beholden to me own darter. It gets yer through, anyway."

"Well, it wor a good word," said Mrs. Patton, blushing and mildly defending herself. "It didn't do none of yer any harm."

"Oh, an' before her, miss, I went to a school to another woman, as lived up Shepherd's Row. You remember her, Betsy Brunt?"

Mrs. Brunt's worn eyes began already to gleam and sparkle.

"Yis, I recolleck very well, Mrs. Jellison. She wor Mercy Moss, an' a goodish deal of trouble you'd use to get me into wi' Mercy Moss, all along o' your tricks."

Mrs. Jellison, still with folded arms, began to rock herself gently up and down as though to stimulate memory.

"My word, but Muster Maurice — he wor the clergyman here then, miss — wor set on Mercy Moss. He and his wife they flattered and cockered her up. Ther wor nobody like her for keepin' school, not in their eyes — till one midsummer — she — well she — I don't want to say nothink onpleasant — *but she transgressed*,"

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said Mrs. Jellison, nodding mysteriously, triumphant however in the unimpeachable delicacy of her language, and looking round the circle for approval.

"What do you say?" asked Marcella, innocently. "What did Mercy Moss do?"

Mrs. Jellison's eyes danced with malice and mischief, but her mouth shut like a vice. Patton leaned forward on his stick, shaken with a sort of inward explosion; his plaintive wife laughed under her breath till she must needs sigh because laughter tired her old bones. Mrs. Brunt gurgled gently. And finally Mrs. Jellison was carried away.

"Oh, my goodness me, don't you make me tell tales o' Mercy Moss!" she said at last, dashing the water out of her eyes with an excited tremulous hand. "She's bin dead and gone these forty year — married and buried mos' respeckable — it 'ud be a burning shame to bring up tales agen her now. Them as tittle-tattles about dead folks needn't look to lie quiet their-selves in their graves. I've said it times, and I'll say it again. What are you lookin' at me for, Betsy Brunt?"

And Mrs. Jellison drew up suddenly with a fierce glance at Mrs. Brunt.

"Why, Mrs. Jellison, I niver meant no offence," said Mrs. Brunt, hastily.

"I won't stand no insinooating," said Mrs. Jellison, with energy. "If you've got soomthink agen me, you may out wi' 't an' niver mind the young lady."

But Mrs. Brunt, much flurried, retreated amid a shower of excuses, pursued by her enemy, who was soon worrying the whole little company, as a dog

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worries a flock of sheep, snapping here and teasing there, chattering at the top of her voice in broad dialect, as she got more and more excited, and quite as ready to break her wit on Marcella as on anybody else. As for the others, most of them had known little else for weeks than alternations of toil and sickness; they were as much amused and excited to-night by Mrs. Jellison's audacities as a Londoner is by his favourite low comedian at his favourite music-hall. They played chorus to her, laughed, baited her; even old Patton was drawn against his will into a caustic sociability.

Marcella meanwhile sat on her stool, her chin upon her hand, and her full glowing eyes turned upon the little spectacle, absorbing it all with a covetous curiosity.

The light-heartedness, the power of enjoyment left in these old folk struck her dumb. Mrs. Brunt had an income of two-and-sixpence a week, *plus* two loaves from the parish, and one of the parish or "charity" houses, a hovel, that is to say, of one room, scarcely fit for human habitation at all. She had lost five children, was allowed two shillings a week by two labourer sons, and earned sixpence a week — about — by continuous work at "the plait." Her husband had been run over by a farm cart and killed; up to the time of his death his earnings averaged about twenty-eight pounds a year. Much the same with the Pattons. They had lost eight children out of ten, and were now mainly supported by the wages of a daughter in service. Mrs. Patton had of late years suffered agonies and humiliations indescribable, from a terrible illness which the parish doctor was quite incompetent

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to treat, being all through a singularly sensitive woman, with a natural instinct for the decorous and the beautiful.

Amazing! Starvation wages; hardships of sickness and pain; horrors of birth and horrors of death; wholesale losses of kindred and friends; the meanest surroundings; the most sordid cares — of this mingled cup of village fate every person in the room had drunk, and drunk deep. Yet here in this autumn twilight, they laughed and chattered, and joked — weird, wrinkled children, enjoying an hour's rough play in a clearing of the storm! Dependent from birth to death on squire, parson, parish, crushed often, and ill-treated, according to their own ideas, but bearing so little ill-will; amusing themselves with their own tragedies even, if they could but sit by a fire and drink a neighbour's cup of tea.

Her heart swelled and burned within her. Yes, the old people were past hoping for; mere wreck and driftwood on the shore, the spring-tide of death would soon have swept them all into unremembered graves. But the young men and women, the children, were they too to grow up, and grow old like these — the same smiling, stunted, ignobly submissive creatures? One woman at least would do her best with her one poor life to rouse some of them to discontent and revolt!

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CHAPTER IX.

THE fire sank, and Mrs. Hurd made no haste to light her lamp. Soon the old people were dim chattering shapes in a red darkness. Mrs. Hurd still plaited, silent and upright, lifting her head every now and then at each sound upon the road.

At last there was a knock at the door. Mrs. Hurd ran to open it.

"Mother, I'm going your way," said a strident voice. "I'll help you home if you've a mind."

On the threshold stood Mrs. Jellison's daughter, Mrs. Westall, with her little boy beside her, the woman's broad shoulders and harsh striking head standing out against the pale sky behind. Marcella noticed that she greeted none of the old people, nor they her. And as for Mrs. Hurd, as soon as she saw the keeper's wife, she turned her back abruptly on her visitor, and walked to the other end of the kitchen.

"Are you comin', mother?" repeated Isabella.

Mrs. Jellison grumbled, gibed at her, and made long leave-takings, while the daughter stood silent, waiting, and every now and then peering at Marcella, who had never seen her before.

"I don' know where yur manners is," said Mrs. Jellison sharply to her, as though she had been a child of ten, "that you don't say good evenin' to the young lady."

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Mrs. Westall curtsied low, and hoped she might be excused, as it had grown so dark. Her tone was smooth and servile, and Marcella disliked her as she shook hands with her.

The other old people, including Mrs. Brunt, departed a minute or two after the mother and daughter, and Marcella was left an instant with Mrs. Hurd.

"Oh, thank you, thank you kindly, miss," said Mrs. Hurd, raising her apron to her eyes to staunch some irrepressible tears, as Marcella showed her the advertisement which it might possibly be worth Hurd's while to answer. "He'll try, you may be sure. But I can't think as how anythink 'ull come ov it."

And then suddenly, as though something unexplained had upset her self-control, the poor patient creature utterly broke down. Leaning against the bare shelves which held their few pots and pans, she threw her apron over her head and burst into the forlornest weeping. "I wish I was dead; I wish I was dead, an' the chillen too!"

Marcella hung over her, one flame of passionate pity, comforting, soothing, promising help. Mrs. Hurd presently recovered enough to tell her that Hurd had gone off that morning before it was light to a farm near Thame, where it had been told him he might possibly find a job.

"But he'll not find it, miss, he'll not find it," she said, twisting her hands in a sort of restless misery; "there's nothing good happens to such as us. An' he wor allus a one to work if he could get it."

There was a sound outside. Mrs. Hurd flew to the door, and a short, deformed man, with a large head

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and red hair, stumbled in blindly, splashed with mud up to his waist, and evidently spent with long walking.

He stopped on the threshold, straining his eyes to see through the fire-lit gloom.

"It's Miss Boyce, Jim," said his wife. "Did you hear of anythink?"

"They're turnin' off hands instead of takin' ov 'em on," he said briefly, and fell into a chair by the grate.

He had hardly greeted Marcella, who had certainly looked to be greeted. Ever since her arrival in August, as she had told Aldous Raeburn, she had taken a warm interest in this man and his family. There was something about them which marked them out a bit from their fellows — whether it was the husband's strange but not repulsive deformity, contrasted with the touch of plaintive grace in the wife, or the charm of the elfish children, with their tiny stick-like arms and legs, and the glancing wildness of their blue eyes, under the frizzle of red hair, which shone round their little sickly faces. Very soon she had begun to haunt them in her eager way, to try and penetrate their peasant lives, which were so full of enigma and attraction to her, mainly because of their very defectiveness, their closeness to an animal simplicity, never to be reached by any one of her sort. She soon discovered or imagined that Hurd had more education than his neighbours. At any rate, he would sit listening to her — and smoking, as she made him do — while she talked politics and socialism to him; and though he said little in return, she made the most of it, and was sure anyway that he was glad to see her come in, and must some time read the labour newspapers and Venturist

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leaflets she brought him, for they were always well thumbed before they came back to her.

But to-night his sullen weariness would make no effort, and the hunted restless glances he threw from side to side as he sat crouching over the fire — the large mouth tight shut, the nostrils working — showed her that he would be glad when she went away.

Her young exacting temper was piqued. She had been for some time trying to arrange their lives for them. So, in spite of his dumb resistance, she lingered on, questioning and suggesting. As to the advertisement she had brought down, he put it aside almost without looking at it. "There ud be a hun'erd men after it before ever he could get there," was all he would say to it. Then she inquired if he had been to ask the steward of the Maxwell Court estate for work. He did not answer, but Mrs. Hurd said timidly that she heard tell a new drive was to be made that winter for the sake of giving employment. But their own men on the estate would come first, and there were plenty of them out of work.

"Well, but there is the game," persisted Marcella. "Isn't it possible they might want some extra men now the pheasant shooting has begun. I might go and inquire of Westall — I know him a little."

The wife made a startled movement, and Hurd raised his misshapen form with a jerk.

"Thank yer, miss, but I'll not trouble yer. I don't want nothing to do with Westall."

And taking up a bit of half-burnt wood which lay on the hearth, he threw it violently back into the grate. Marcella looked from one to the other with

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surprise. Mrs. Hurd's expression was one of miserable discomfort, and she kept twisting her apron in her gnarled hands.

"Yes, I *shall* tell, Jim!" she broke out. "I shall. I know Miss Boyce is one as ull understand —"

Hurd turned round and looked at his wife full. But she persisted.

"You see, miss, they don't speak, don't Jim and George Westall. When Jim was quite a lad he was employed at Mellor, under old Westall, George's father as was. Jim was 'watcher,' and young George he was assistant. That was in Mr. Robert's days, you understand, miss — when Master Harold was alive; and they took a deal o' trouble about the game. An' George Westall, he was allays leading the others a life — tale-bearing an' spyin', an' settin' his father against any of 'em as didn't give in to him. An', oh, he behaved *fearful* to Jim! Jim ull tell you. Now, Jim, what's wrong with you — why shouldn't I tell?"

For Hurd had risen, and as he and his wife looked at each other a sort of mute conversation seemed to pass between them. Then he turned angrily, and went out of the cottage by the back door into the garden.

The wife sat in some agitation a moment, then she resumed. "He can't bear no talk about Westall — it seems to drive him silly. But I say as how people *should* know."

Her wavering eye seemed to interrogate her companion. Marcella was puzzled by her manner — it was so far from simple.

"But that was long ago, surely," she said.

"Yes, it wor long ago, but you don't forget them

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things, miss! An' Westall, he's just the same sort as he was then, so folks say," she added hurriedly. "You see Jim, miss, how he's made? His back was twisted that way when he was a little un. His father was a good old man — everybody spoke well of 'im — but his mother, she was a queer mad body, with red hair, just like Jim and the children, and a temper! my word. They do say she was an Irish girl, out of a gang as used to work near here — an' she let him drop one day when she was in liquor, an' never took no trouble about him afterwards. He was a poor sickly lad, he was! you'd wonder how he grew up at all. And oh! George Westall he treated him *cruel*. He'd kick and swear at him; then he'd dare him to fight, an' thrash him till the others came in, an' got him away. Then he'd carry tales to his father, and one day old Westall beat Jim within an inch of 'is life, with a strap end, because of a lie George told 'im. The poor chap lay in a ditch under Disley Wood all day, because he was that knocked about he couldn't walk, and at night he crawled home on his hands and knees. He's shown me the place many a time! Then he told his father, and next morning he told me, as he couldn't stand it no longer, an' he never went back no more."

"And he told no one else? — he never complained?" asked Marcella, indignantly.

"What ud ha been the good o' that, miss?" Mrs. Hurd said, wondering. "Nobody ud ha taken his word agen old Westall's. But he come and told me. I was housemaid at Lady Leven's then, an' he and his father were old friends of ourn. And I knew George Westall too. He used to walk out with me of a

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Sunday, just as civil as could be, and give my mother rabbits now and again, and do anything I'd ask him. An' I up and told him he was a brute to go ill-treatin' a sickly fellow as couldn't pay him back. That made him as cross as vinegar, an' when Jim began to be about with me ov a Sunday sometimes, instead of him, he got madder and madder. An' Jim asked me to marry him — he begged of me — an' I didn't know what to say. For Westall had asked me twice; an' I was afeard of Jim's health, an' the low wages he'd get, an' of not bein' strong myself. But one day I was going up a lane into Tudley End woods, an' I heard George Westall on tother side of the hedge with a young dog he was training. Somethin' crossed him, an' he flew into a passion with it. It turned me *sick*. I ran away and I took against him there and then. I was frightened of him. I duresn't trust myself, and I said to Jim I'd take him. So you can understan', miss, can't you, as Jim don't want to have nothing to do with Westall? Thank you kindly, all the same," she added, breaking off her narrative with the same uncertainty of manner, the same timid scrutiny of her visitor that Marcella had noticed before.

Marcella replied that she could certainly understand.

"But I suppose they've not got in each other's way of late years," she said as she rose to go.

"Oh! no, miss, no," said Mrs. Hurd as she went hurriedly to fetch a fur tippet which her visitor had laid down on the dresser.

"There is *one* person I can speak to," said Marcella, as she put on the wrap. "And I will." Against her will she reddened a little; but she had not been able

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to help throwing out the promise. "And now, you won't despair, will you? You'll trust me? I could always do something."

She took Mrs. Hurd's hand with a sweet look and gesture. Standing there in her tall vigorous youth, her furs wrapped about her, she had the air of protecting and guiding this poverty that could not help itself. The mother and wife felt herself shy, intimidated. The tears came back to her brown eyes.

When Miss Boyce had gone, Minta Hurd went to the fire and put it together, sighing all the time, her face still red and miserable.

The door opened and her husband came in. He carried some potatoes in his great earth-stained hands.

"You're goin' to put that bit of hare on? Well, mak' eëaste, do, for I'm starvin'. What did she want to stay all that time for? You go and get it. I'll blow the fire up — damn these sticks! — they're as wet as Dugnall pond."

Nevertheless, as she sadly came and went, preparing the supper, she saw that he was appeased, in a better temper than before.

"What did you tell 'er?" he asked abruptly.

"What do you spose I'd tell her? I acted for the best. I'm always thinkin' for you!" she said as though with a little cry, "or we'd soon be in trouble — worse trouble than we are!" she added miserably.

He stopped working the old bellows for a moment, and, holding his long chin, stared into the flames. With his deformity, his earth-stains, his blue eyes, his brown wrinkled skin, and his shock of red hair,

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he had the look of some strange gnome crouching there.

"I don't know what you're at, I'll swear," he said after a pause. "I ain't in any pertickler trouble just now — if yer wouldn't send a fellow stumpin' the country for nothink. If you'll just let me alone I'll get a livin' for you and the chillen right enough. Don't you trouble yourself — an' hold your tongue!"

She threw down her apron with a gesture of despair as she stood beside him, in front of the fire, watching the pan.

"What am I to do, Jim, an' them chillen — when you're took to prison?" she asked him vehemently.

"I shan't get took to prison, I tell yer. All the same, Westall got holt o' me this mornin'. I thought praps you'd better know."

Her exclamation of terror, her wild look at him, were exactly what he had expected; nevertheless, he flinched before them. His brutality was mostly assumed. He had adopted it as a mask for more than a year past, because he *must* go his way, and she worried him.

"Now look here," he said resolutely, "it don't matter. I'm not goin' to be took by Westall. I'd kill him or myself first. But he caught me lookin' at a snare this mornin' — it wor misty, and I didn't see no one comin'. It wor close to the footpath, and it worn't my snare."

"'Jim, my chap,' says he, mockin', 'I'm sorry for it, but I'm going to search yer, so take it quietly,' says he. He had young Dynes with him — so I didn't say nought — I kep' as still as a mouse, an' sure enough

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he put his ugly han's into all my pockets. An' what do yer think he foun'?"

"What?" she said breathlessly.

"Nothink!" he laughed out. "Nary an end o' string, nor a kink o' wire — nothink. I'd hidden the two rabbits I got las' night, and all my bits o' things in a ditch far enough out o' his way. I just laughed at the look ov 'im. 'I'll have the law on yer for assault an' battery, yer damned miscalculatin' brute!' says I to him — 'why don't yer get that boy there to teach yer your business?' An' off I walked. Don't you be afeared — 'ee'll never lay hands on me!"

But Minta was sore afraid, and went on talking and lamenting while she made the tea. He took little heed of her. He sat by the fire quivering and thinking. In a public-house two nights before this one, overtures had been made to him on behalf of a well-known gang of poachers with head-quarters in a neighbouring county town, who had their eyes on the pheasant preserves in Westall's particular beat — the Tudley End beat — and wanted a local watcher and accomplice. He had thought the matter at first too dangerous to touch. Moreover, he was at that moment in a period of transition, pestered by Minta to give up "the poachin'," and yet drawn back to it after his spring and summer of field work by instincts only recently revived, after long dormancy, but now hard to resist.

Presently he turned with anger upon one of Minta's wails which happened to reach him.

"Look 'ere!" said he to her, "where ud you an' the chillen be this night if I 'adn't done it? 'Adn't we got rid of every stick o' stuff we iver 'ad? 'Ere's a

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well-furnished place for a chap to sit in!"—he glanced bitterly round the bare kitchen, which had none of the little properties of the country poor, no chest, no set of mahogany drawers, no comfortable chair, nothing, but the dresser and the few rush chairs and the table, and a few odds and ends of crockery and household stuff—"wouldn't we all a bin on the parish, if we 'adn't starved fust—*wouldn't* we?—jes' answer me that! *Didn't* we sit here an' starve, till the bones was comin' through the chillen's skin?—didn't we?"

That he could still argue the point with her showed the inner vulnerableness, the inner need of her affection and of peace with her, which he still felt, far as certain new habits were beginning to sweep him from her.

"It's Westall or Jenkins (Jenkins was the village policeman) havin' the *law* on yer, Jim," she said with emphasis, putting down a cup and looking at him—"it's the thought of *that* makes me cold in my back. None o' *my* people was ever in prison—an' if it 'appened to you I should just die of shame!"

"Then yer'd better take and read them papers there as *she* brought," he said impatiently, first jerking his finger over his shoulder in the direction of Mellor to indicate Miss Boyce, and then pointing to a heap of newspapers which lay on the floor in a corner, "they'd tell yer summat about the shame o' *makin'* them game-laws—not o' breakin' ov 'em. But I'm sick o' this! Where's them chillen? Why do yer let that boy out so late?"

And opening the door he stood on the threshold looking up and down the village street, while Minta

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once more gave up the struggle, dried her eyes, and told herself to be cheerful. But it was hard. She was far better born and better educated than her husband. Her father had been a small master chairmaker in Wycombe, and her mother, a lackadaisical silly woman, had given her her "fine" name by way of additional proof that she and her children were something out of the common. Moreover, she had the conforming law-abiding instincts of the well-treated domestic servant, who has lived on kindly terms with the gentry and shared their standards. And for years after their marriage Hurd had allowed her to govern him. He had been so patient, so hard-working, such a kind husband and father, so full of a dumb wish to show her he was grateful to her for marrying such a fellow as he. The quarrel with Westall seemed to have sunk out of his mind. He never spoke to or of him. Low wages, the burden of quick-coming children, the bad sanitary conditions of their wretched cottage, and poor health, had made their lives one long and sordid struggle. But for years he had borne his load with extraordinary patience. He and his could just exist, and the man who had been in youth the lonely victim of his neighbours' scorn had found a woman to give him all herself and children to love. Hence years of submission, a hidden flowering time for both of them.

Till that last awful winter! — the winter before Richard Boyce's succession to Mellor — when the farmers had been mostly ruined, and half the able-bodied men of Mellor had tramped "up into the smoke," as the village put it, in search of London work

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—then, out of actual sheer starvation — that very rare excuse of the poacher! — Hurd had gone one night and snared a hare on the Mellor land. Would the wife and mother ever forget the pure animal satisfaction of that meal, or the fearful joy of the next night, when he got three shillings from a local publican for a hare and two rabbits?

But after the first relief Minta had gone in fear and trembling. For the old woodcraft revived in Hurd, and the old passion for the fields and their chances which he had felt as a lad before his "watcher's" place had been made intolerable to him by George Westall's bullying. He became excited, unmanageable. Very soon he was no longer content with Mellor, where, since the death of young Harold, the heir, the keepers had been dismissed, and what remained of a once numerous head of game lay open to the wiles of all the bold spirits of the neighbourhood. He must needs go on to those woods of Lord Maxwell's, which girdled the Mellor estate on three sides. And here he came once more across his enemy. For George Westall was now in the far better-paid service of the Court — and a very clever keeper, with designs on the head keeper's post whenever it might be vacant. In the case of a poacher he had the scent of one of his own hares. It was known to him in an incredibly short time that that "low caselty fellow Hurd" was attacking "his" game.

Hurd, notwithstanding, was cunning itself, and Westall lay in wait for him in vain. Meanwhile, all the old hatred between the two men revived. Hurd drank this winter more than he had ever drunk yet.

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It was necessary to keep on good terms with one or two publicans who acted as "receivers" of the poached game of the neighbourhood. And it seemed to him that Westall pursued him into these low dens. The keeper — big, burly, prosperous — would speak to him with insolent patronage, watching him all the time, or with the old brutality, which Hurd dared not resent. Only in his excitable dwarf's sense hate grew and throve, very soon to monstrous proportions. Westall's menacing figure darkened all his sky for him. His poaching, besides a means of livelihood, became more and more a silent duel between him and his boyhood's tyrant.

And now, after seven months of regular field-work and respectable living, it was all to begin again with the new winter! The same shudders and terrors, the same shames before the gentry and Mr. Harden! — the soft, timid woman with her conscience could not endure the prospect. For some weeks after the harvest was over she struggled. He had begun to go out again at nights. But she drove him to look for employment, and lived in tears when he failed.

As for him, she knew that he was glad to fail; there was a certain ease and jauntiness in his air to-night as he stood calling the children:

"Will! — you come in at once! Daisy! — Nellie!"

Two little figures came pattering up the street in the moist October dusk, a third panted behind. The girls ran in to their mother chattering and laughing. Hurd lifted the boy in his arm.

"Where you bin, Will? What were yo out for in this nasty damp? I've brought yo a whole pocket full o' chestnuts, and summat else too."

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He carried him in to the fire and sat him on his knees. The little emaciated creature, flushed with the pleasure of his father's company, played contentedly in the intervals of coughing with the shining chestnuts, or ate his slice of the fine pear — the gift of a friend in Thame — which proved to be the "summat else" of promise. The curtains were close-drawn; the paraffin lamp flared on the table, and as the savoury smell of the hare and onions on the fire filled the kitchen, the whole family gathered round watching for the moment of eating. The fire played on the thin legs and pinched faces of the children; on the baby's cradle in the further corner; on the mother, red-eyed still, but able to smile and talk again; on the strange Celtic face and matted hair of the dwarf. Family affection — and the satisfaction of the simpler physical needs — these things make the happiness of the poor. For this hour, to-night, the Hurds were happy.

Meanwhile, in the lane outside, Marcella, as she walked home, passed a tall broad-shouldered man in a velveteen suit and gaiters, his gun over his shoulder and two dogs behind him, his pockets bulging on either side. He walked with a kind of military air, and touched his cap to her as he passed.

Marcella barely nodded.

"Tyrant and bully!" she thought to herself with Mrs. Hurd's story in her mind. "Yet no doubt he is a valuable keeper; Lord Maxwell would be sorry to lose him! It is the system makes such men — and must have them."

The clatter of a pony carriage disturbed her thoughts.

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A small, elderly lady, in a very large mushroom hat, drove past her in the dusk and bowed stiffly. Marcella was so taken by surprise that she barely returned the bow. Then she looked after the carriage. That was Miss Raeburn.

To-morrow!

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CHAPTER X.

"Won't you sit nearer to the window? We are rather proud of our view at this time of year," said Miss Raeburn to Marcella, taking her visitor's jacket from her as she spoke, and laying it aside. "Lady Winterbourne is late, but she will come, I am sure. She is very precise about engagements."

Marcella moved her chair nearer to the great bow-window, and looked out over the sloping gardens of the Court, and the autumn splendour of the woods girdling them in on all sides. She held her head nervously erect, was not apparently much inclined to talk, and Miss Raeburn, who had resumed her knitting within a few paces of her guest, said to herself presently after a few minutes' conversation on the weather and the walk from Mellor: "Difficult — decidedly difficult — and too much manner for a young girl. But the most picturesque creature I ever set eyes on!"

Lord Maxwell's sister was an excellent woman, the inquisitive, benevolent despot of all the Maxwell villages; and one of the soundest Tories still left to a degenerate party and a changing time. Her brother and her great-nephew represented to her the flower of human kind; she had never been capable, and probably never would be capable, of quarrelling with either of them on any subject whatever. At the same

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time she had her rights with them. She was at any rate their natural guardian in those matters, relating to womankind, where men are confessedly given to folly. She had accordingly kept a shrewd eye in Aldous's interest on all the young ladies of the neighbourhood for many years past; knew perfectly well all that he might have done, and sighed over all that he had so far left undone.

At the present moment, in spite of the even good-breeding with which she knitted and chattered beside Marcella, she was in truth consumed with curiosity, conjecture, and alarm on the subject of this Miss Boyce. Profoundly as they trusted each other, the Raeburns were not on the surface a communicative family. Neither her brother nor Aldous had so far bestowed any direct confidence upon her; but the course of affairs had, notwithstanding, aroused her very keenest attention. In the first place, as we know, the mistress of Maxwell Court had left Mellor and its new occupants unvisited; she had plainly understood it to be her brother's wish that she should do so. How, indeed, could you know the women without knowing Richard Boyce? which, according to Lord Maxwell, was impossible. And now it was Lord Maxwell who had suggested not only that after all it would be kind to call upon the poor things, who were heavily weighted enough already with Dick Boyce for husband and father, but that it would be a graceful act on his sister's part to ask the girl and her mother to luncheon. Dick Boyce of course must be made to keep his distance, but the resources of civilisation were perhaps not unequal to the task of discriminat-

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ing, if it were prudently set about. At any rate Miss Raeburn gathered that she was expected to try, and instead of pressing her brother for explanations she held her tongue, paid her call forthwith, and wrote her note.

But although Aldous, thinking no doubt that he had been already sufficiently premature, had said nothing at all as to his own feelings to his great-aunt, she knew perfectly well that he had said a great deal on the subject of Miss Boyce and her mother to Lady Winterbourne, the only woman in the neighbourhood with whom he was ever really confidential. No woman, of course, in Miss Raeburn's position, and with Miss Raeburn's general interest in her kind, could have been ignorant for any appreciable number of days after the Boyces' arrival at Mellor that they possessed a handsome daughter, of whom the Hardens in particular gave striking but, as Miss Raeburn privately thought, by no means wholly attractive accounts. And now, after all these somewhat agitating preliminaries, here was the girl established in the Court drawing-room, Aldous more nervous and preoccupied than she had ever seen him, and Lord Maxwell expressing a particular anxiety to return from his Board meeting in good time for luncheon, to which he had especially desired that Lady Winterbourne should be bidden, and no one else! It may well be supposed that Miss Raeburn was on the alert.

As for Marcella, she was on her side keenly conscious of being observed, of having her way to make. Here she was alone among these formidable people, whose acquaintance she had in a manner compelled.

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Well — what blame? What was to prevent her from doing the same thing again to-morrow? Her conscience was absolutely clear. If they were not ready to meet her in the same spirit in which through Mr. Raeburn she had approached them, she would know perfectly well how to protect herself — above all, how to live out her life in the future without troubling them.

Meanwhile, in spite of her dignity and those inward propitiations it from time to time demanded, she was, in her human vivid way, full of an excitement and curiosity she could hardly conceal as perfectly as she desired — curiosity as to the great house and the life in it, especially as to Aldous Raeburn's part therein. She knew very little indeed of the class to which by birth she belonged; great houses and great people were strange to her. She brought her artist's and student's eyes to look at them with; she was determined not to be dazzled or taken in by them. At the same time, as she glanced every now and then round the splendid room in which they sat, with its Tudor ceiling, its fine pictures, its combination of every luxury with every refinement, she was distinctly conscious of a certain thrill, a romantic drawing towards the stateliness and power which it all implied, together with a proud and careless sense of equality, of kinship so to speak, which she made light of, but would not in reality have been without for the world.

In birth and blood she had nothing to yield to the Raeburns — so her mother assured her. If things were to be vulgarly measured, this fact too must come in. But they should not be vulgarly measured. She

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did not believe in class or wealth — not at all. Only — as her mother had told her — she must hold her head up. An inward temper, which no doubt led to that excess of manner of which Miss Raeburn was meanwhile conscious.

Where were the gentlemen? Marcella was beginning to resent and tire of the innumerable questions as to her likes and dislikes, her accomplishments, her friends, her opinions of Mellor and the neighbourhood, which this knitting lady beside her poured out upon her so briskly, when to her great relief the door opened and a footman announced "Lady Winterbourne."

A very tall thin lady in black entered the room at the words. "My dear!" she said to Miss Raeburn, "I am very late, but the roads are abominable, and those horses Edward has just given me have to be taken such tiresome care of. I told the coachman next time he might wrap them in shawls and put them to bed, and *I* should walk."

"You are quite capable of it, my dear," said Miss Raeburn, kissing her. "We know you! Miss Boyce — Lady Winterbourne."

Lady Winterbourne shook hands with a shy awkwardness which belied her height and stateliness. As she sat down beside Miss Raeburn the contrast between her and Lord Maxwell's sister was sufficiently striking. Miss Raeburn was short, inclined to be stout, and to a certain gay profusion in her attire. Her cap was made of a bright silk handkerchief edged with lace; round her neck were hung a number of small trinkets on various gold chains; she abounded too in bracelets, most of which were clearly old-

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fashioned mementos of departed relatives or friends. Her dress was a cheerful red verging on crimson; and her general air suggested energy, bustle, and a good-humoured common sense.

Lady Winterbourne, on the other hand, was not only dressed from head to foot in severe black without an ornament; her head and face belonged also to the same impression, as of some strong and forcible study in black and white. The attitude was rigidly erect; the very dark eyes, under the snowy and abundant hair, had a trick of absent staring; in certain aspects the whole figure had a tragic, nay, formidable dignity, from which one expected, and sometimes got, the tone and gesture of tragic acting. Yet at the same time, mixed in therewith, a curious strain of womanish, nay childish, weakness, appealingness. Altogether, a great lady, and a personality — yet something else too — something ill-assured, timid, incongruous — hard to be defined.

"I believe you have not been at Mellor long?" the new-comer asked, in a deep contralto voice which she dragged a little.

"About seven weeks. My father and mother have been there since May."

"You must of course think it a very interesting old place?"

"Of course I do; I love it," said Marcella, disconcerted by the odd habit Lady Winterbourne had of fixing her eyes upon a person, and then, as it were, forgetting what she had done with them.

"Oh, I haven't been there, Agneta," said the new-comer, turning after a pause to Miss Raeburn, "since

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that summer — *you* remember that party when the Palmerstons came over — so long ago — twenty years!"

Marcella sat stiffly upright. Lady Winterbourne grew a little nervous and flurried.

"I don't think I ever saw your mother, Miss Boyce — I was much away from home about then. Oh, yes, I did once —"

The speaker stopped, a sudden red suffusing her pale cheeks. She had felt certain somehow, at sight of Marcella, that she should say or do something untoward, and she had promptly justified her own prevision. The only time she had ever seen Mrs. Boyce had been in court, on the last day of the famous trial in which Richard Boyce was concerned, when she had made out the wife sitting closely veiled as near to her husband as possible, waiting for the verdict. As she had already confided this reminiscence to Miss Raeburn, and had forgotten she had done so, both ladies had a moment of embarrassment.

"Mrs. Boyce, I am sorry to say, does not seem to be strong," said Miss Raeburn, bending over the heel of her stocking. "I wish we could have had the pleasure of seeing her to-day."

There was a pause. Lady Winterbourne's tragic eyes were once more considering Marcella.

"I hope you will come and see me," she said at last abruptly — "and Mrs. Boyce too."

The voice was very soft and refined though so deep, and Marcella looking up was suddenly magnetised.

"Yes, I will," she said, all her face melting into sensitive life. "Mamma won't go anywhere, but I will come, if you will ask me."

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"Will you come next Tuesday?" said Lady Winterbourne quickly — "come to tea, and I will drive you back. Mr. Raeburn told me about you. He says — you read a great deal."

The solemnity of the last words, the fixedness of the tragic look, were not to be resisted. Marcella laughed out, and both ladies simultaneously thought her extraordinarily radiant and handsome.

"How can he know? Why, I have hardly talked about books to him at all."

"Well! here he comes," said Lady Winterbourne, smiling suddenly; "so I can ask him. But I am sure he did say so."

It was now Marcella's turn to colour. Aldous Raeburn crossed the room, greeted Lady Winterbourne, and next moment she felt her hand in his.

"You did tell me, Aldous, didn't you," said Lady Winterbourne, "that Miss Boyce was a great reader?"

The speaker had known Aldous Raeburn as a boy, and was, moreover, a sort of cousin, which explained the Christian name.

Aldous smiled.

"I said I thought Miss Boyce was like you and me, and had a weakness that way, Lady Winterbourne. But I won't be cross-examined!"

"I don't think I am a great reader," said Marcella, bluntly — "at least I read a great deal, but I hardly ever read a book through. I haven't patience."

"You want to get at everything so quickly?" said Miss Raeburn, looking up sharply.

"I suppose so!" said Marcella. "There seems to

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be always a hundred things tearing one different ways, and no time for any of them."

"Yes, when one is young one feels like that," said Lady Winterbourne, sighing. "When one is old one accepts one's limitations. When I was twenty I never thought that I should still be an ignorant and discontented woman at nearly seventy."

"It is because you are so young still, Lady Winterbourne, that you feel so," said Aldous, laughing at her, as one does at an old friend. "Why, you are younger than any of us! I feel all brushed and stirred up — a boy at school again — after I have been to see you!"

"Well, I don't know what you mean, I'm sure," said Lady Winterbourne, sighing again. Then she looked at the pair beside her — at the alert brightness in the man's strong and quiet face as he sat stooping forward, with his hands upon his knees, hardly able to keep his eyes for an instant from the dark apparition beside him — at the girl's evident shyness and pride.

"My dear!" she said, turning suddenly to Miss Raeburn, "have you heard what a monstrosity Alice has produced this last time in the way of a baby? It was born with four teeth!"

Miss Raeburn's astonishment fitted the provocation, and the two old friends fell into a gossip on the subject of Lady Winterbourne's numerous family, which was clearly meant for a *tête-à-tête*.

"Will you come and look at our tapestry?" said Aldous to his neighbour, after a few nothings had passed between them as to the weather and her walk

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from Mellor. "I think you would admire it, and I am afraid my grandfather will be a few minutes yet. He hoped to get home earlier than this, but his Board meeting was very long and important, and has kept him an unconscionable time."

Marcella rose, and they moved together towards the south end of the room where a famous piece of Italian Renaissance tapestry entirely filled the wall from side to side.

"How beautiful!" cried the girl, her eyes filling with delight. "What a delicious thing to live with."

And, indeed, it was the most adorable medley of forms, tints, suggestions, of gods and goddesses, nymphs and shepherds, standing in flowery grass under fruit-laden trees and wreathed about with roses. Both colour and subject were of fairyland. The golds and browns and pinks of it, the greens and ivory whites had been mellowed and pearled and warmed by age into a most glowing, delicate, and fanciful beauty. It was Italy at the great moment — subtle, rich, exuberant.

Aldous enjoyed her pleasure.

"I thought you would like it; I hoped you would. It has been my special delight since I was a child, when my mother first routed it out of a garret. I am not sure that I don't in my heart prefer it to any of the pictures."

"The flowers!" said Marcella, absorbed in it — "look at them — the irises, the cyclamens, the lilies! It reminds one of the dreams one used to have when one was small of what it would be like to have *flowers enough*. I was at school, you know, in a part of Eng-

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land where one seemed always cheated out of them! We walked two and two along the straight roads, and I found one here and one there — but such a beggarly, wretched few, for all one's trouble. I used to hate the hard dry soil, and console myself by imagining countries where the flowers grew like this — yes, just like this, in a gold and pink and blue mass, so that one might thrust one's hands in and gather and gather till one was really *satisfied!* That is the worst of being at school when you are poor! You never get enough of anything. One day it's flowers — but the next day it is pudding — and the next frocks."

Her eye was sparkling, her tongue loosened. Not only was it pleasant to feel herself beside him, enwrapped in such an atmosphere of admiration and deference, but the artistic sensitive chord in her had been struck, and vibrated happily.

"Well, only wait till May, and the cowslips in your own fields will make up to you!" he said, smiling at her. "But now, I have been wondering to myself in my room upstairs what you would like to see. There are a good many treasures in this house, and you will care for them, because you are an artist. But you shall not be bored with them! You shall see what and as much as you like. You had about a quarter of an hour's talk with my aunt, did you not?" he asked, in a quite different tone.

So all the time while she and Miss Raeburn had been making acquaintance, he had known that she was in the house, and he had kept away for his own purposes! Marcella felt a colour she could not restrain leap into her cheek.

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"Miss Raeburn was very kind," she said, with a return of shyness, which passed however the next moment by reaction, into her usual daring. "Yes, she was very kind! — but all the same she doesn't like me — I don't think she is going to like me — I am not her sort."

"Have you been talking Socialism to her?" he asked her, smiling.

"No, not yet — not yet," she said emphatically. "But I am dreadfully uncertain — I can't always hold my tongue — I am afraid you will be sorry you took me up."

"Are you so aggressive? But Aunt Neta is so mild! — she wouldn't hurt a fly. She mothers every one in the house and out of it. The only people she is hard upon are the little servant girls, who will wear feathers in their hats!"

"There!" cried Marcella, indignantly. "Why shouldn't they wear feathers in their hats? It is their form of beauty — their tapestry!"

"But if one can't have both feathers and boots?" he asked her humbly, a twinkle in his grey eye. "If one hasn't boots, one may catch a cold and die of it — which is, after all, worse than going featherless."

"But why *can't* they have feathers and boots? It is because you — we — have got too much. You have the tapestry — and — and the pictures" — she turned and looked round the room — "and this wonderful house — and the park. Oh, no — I think it is Miss Raeburn has too many feathers!"

"Perhaps it is," he admitted, in a different tone, his look changing and saddening as though some habitual

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struggle of thought were recalled to him. "You see I am in a difficulty. I want to show you our feathers. I think they would please you — and you make me ashamed of them."

"How absurd!" cried Marcella, "when I told you how I liked the school children bobbing to me!"

They laughed, and then Aldous looked round with a start — "Ah, here is my grandfather!"

Then he stood back, watching the look with which Lord Maxwell, after greeting Lady Winterbourne, approached Miss Boyce. He saw the old man's somewhat formal approach, the sudden kindle in the blue eyes which marked the first effect of Marcella's form and presence, the bow, the stately shake of the hand. The lover hearing his own heart beat, realised that his beautiful lady had so far done well.

"You must let me say that I see a decided likeness in you to your grandfather," said Lord Maxwell, when they were all seated at lunch, Marcella on his left hand, opposite to Lady Winterbourne. "He was one of my dearest friends."

"I'm afraid I don't know much about him," said Marcella, rather bluntly, "except what I have got out of old letters. I never saw him that I remember."

Lord Maxwell left the subject, of course, at once, but showed a great wish to talk to her, and make her talk. He had pleasant things to say about Mellor and its past, which could be said without offence; and some conversation about the Boyce monuments in Mellor church led to a discussion of the part played by the different local families in the Civil Wars, in which it seemed to Aldous that his grandfather tried

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in various shrewd and courteous ways to make Marcella feel at ease with herself and her race, accepted, as it were, of right into the local brotherhood, and so to soothe and heal those bruised feelings he could not but divine.

The girl carried herself a little loftily, answering with an independence and freedom beyond her age and born of her London life. She was not in the least abashed or shy. Yet it was clear that Lord Maxwell's first impressions were favourable. Aldous caught every now and then his quick, judging look sweeping over her and instantly withdrawn — comparing, as the grandson very well knew, every point, and tone, and gesture with some inner ideal of what a Raeburn's wife should be. How dream-like the whole scene was to Aldous, yet how exquisitely real! The room, with its carved and gilt cedar-wood panels, its Vandykes, its tall windows opening on the park, the autumn sun flooding the gold and purple fruit on the table, and sparkling on the glass and silver, the figures of his aunt and Lady Winterbourne, the moving servants, and dominant of it all, interpreting it all for him anew, the dark, lithe creature beside his grandfather, so quick, sensitive, extravagant, so much a woman, yet, to his lover's sense, so utterly unlike any other woman he had ever seen — every detail of it was charged to him with a thousand new meanings, now oppressive, now delightful.

For he was passing out of the first stage of passion, in which it is, almost, its own satisfaction, so new and enriching is it to the whole nature, into the second stage — the stage of anxiety, incredulity. Marcella,

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sitting there on his own ground, after all his planning, seemed to him not nearer, but further from him. She was terribly on her dignity! Where was all that girlish abandonment gone which she had shown him on that walk, beside the gate? There had been a touch of it, a divine touch, before luncheon. How could he get her to himself again?

Meanwhile the conversation passed to the prevailing local topic — the badness of the harvest, the low prices of everything, the consequent depression among the farmers, and stagnation in the villages.

"I don't know what is to be done for the people this winter," said Lord Maxwell, "without pauperising them, I mean. To give money is easy enough. Our grandfathers would have doled out coal and blankets, and thought no more of it. We don't get through so easily."

"No," said Lady Winterbourne, sighing. "It weighs one down. Last winter was a nightmare. The tales one heard, and the faces one saw! — though we seemed to be always giving. And in the middle of it Edward would buy me a new set of sables. I begged him not, but he laughed at me."

"Well, my dear," said Miss Raeburn, cheerfully, "if nobody bought sables, there'd be other poor people up in Russia, isn't it? — or Hudson's Bay? — badly off. One has to think of that. Oh, you needn't talk, Aldous! I know you say it's a fallacy. *I* call it common sense."

She got, however, only a slight smile from Aldous, who had long ago left his great-aunt to work out her own economics. And, anyway, she saw that he

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was wholly absorbed from his seat beside Lady Winterbourne in watching Miss Boyce.

"It's precisely as Lord Maxwell says," replied Lady Winterbourne; "that kind of thing used to satisfy everybody. And our grandmothers were very good women. I don't know why we, who give ourselves so much more trouble than they did, should carry these thorns about with us, while they went free."

She drew herself up, a cloud over her fine eyes. Miss Raeburn, looking round, was glad to see the servants had left the room.

"Miss Boyce thinks we are all in a very bad way, I'm sure. I have heard tales of Miss Boyce's opinions!" said Lord Maxwell, smiling at her, with an old man's indulgence, as though provoking her to talk.

Her slim fingers were nervously crumbling some bread beside her; her head was drooped a little. At his challenge she looked up with a start. She was perfectly conscious of him, as both the great magnate on his native heath, and as the trained man of affairs condescending to a girl's fancies. But she had made up her mind not to be afraid.

"What tales have you heard?" she asked him.

"You alarm us, you know," he said gallantly, waiving her question. "We can't afford a prophetess to the other side, just now."

Miss Raeburn drew herself up, with a sharp dry look at Miss Boyce, which escaped every one but Lady Winterbourne.

"Oh! I am not a Radical!" said Marcella, half

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scornfully. "We Socialists don't fight for either political party as such. We take what we can get out of both."

"So you call yourself a Socialist? A real full-blown one?"

Lord Maxwell's pleasant tone masked the mood of a man who after a morning of hard work thinks himself entitled to some amusement at luncheon.

"Yes, I am a Socialist," she said slowly, looking at him. "At least I ought to be — I am in my conscience."

"But not in your judgment?" he said laughing. "Isn't that the condition of most of us?"

"No, not at all!" she exclaimed, both her vanity and her enthusiasm roused by his manner. "Both my judgment and my conscience make me a Socialist. It's only one's wretched love for one's own little luxuries and precedences — the worst part of one — that makes me waver, makes me a traitor! The people I worked with in London would think me a traitor often, I know."

"And you really think that the world ought to be 'hatched over again and hatched different'? That it ought to be, if it could be?"

"I think that things are intolerable as they are," she broke out, after a pause. "The London poor were bad enough; the country poor seem to me worse! How can any one believe that such serfdom and poverty — such mutilation of mind and body — were meant to go on for ever!"

Lord Maxwell's brows lifted. But it certainly was no wonder that Aldous should find those eyes of hers superb?

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"Can you really imagine, my dear young lady," he asked her mildly, "that if all property were divided to-morrow the force of natural inequality would not have undone all the work the day after, and given us back our poor?"

The "newspaper cant" of this remark, as the Cravens would have put it, brought a contemptuous look for an instant into the girl's face. She began to talk eagerly and cleverly, showing a very fair training in the catch words of the school, and a good memory — as one uncomfortable person at the table soon perceived — for some of the leading arguments and illustrations of a book of Venturist Essays which had lately been much read and talked of in London.

Then, irritated more and more by Lord Maxwell's gentle attention, and the interjections he threw in from time to time, she plunged into history, attacked the landowning class, spoke of the Statute of Labourers, the Law of Settlement, the New Poor Law, and other great matters, all in the same quick flow of glancing, picturesque speech, and all with the same utter oblivion — so it seemed to her stiff indignant hostess at the other end of the table — of the manners and modesty proper to a young girl in a strange house, and that young girl Richard Boyce's daughter!

Aldous struck in now and then, trying to soothe her by supporting her to a certain extent, and so divert the conversation. But Marcella was soon too excited to be managed; and she had her say; a very strong say often as far as language went: there could be no doubt of that.

"Ah, well," said Lord Maxwell, wincing at last

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under some of her phrases, in spite of his courteous *savoir-faire*, "I see you are of the same opinion as a good man whose book I took up yesterday: 'The landlords of England have always shown a mean and malignant passion for profiting by the miseries of others?' Well, Aldous, my boy, we are judged, you and I — no help for it!"

The man whose temper and rule had made the prosperity of a whole country side for nearly forty years, looked at his grandson with twinkling eyes. Miss Raeburn was speechless. Lady Winterbourne was absently staring at Marcella, a spot of red on each pale cheek.

Then Marcella suddenly wavered, looked across at Aldous, and broke down.

"Of course, you think me very ridiculous," she said, with a tremulous change of tone. "I suppose I am. And I am as inconsistent as anybody — I hate myself for it. Very often when anybody talks to me on the other side, I am almost as much persuaded as I am by the Socialists: they always told me in London I was the prey of the last speaker. But it can't make any difference to one's *feeling:* nothing touches that."

She turned to Lord Maxwell, half appealing —

"It is when I go down from our house to the village; when I see the places the people live in; when one is comfortable in the carriage, and one passes some woman in the rain, ragged and dirty and tired, trudging back from her work; when one realises that they have no *rights* when they come to be old, nothing to look to but charity, for which *we*, who have every-

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thing, expect them to be grateful; and when I know that every one of them has done more useful work in a year of their life than I shall ever do in the whole of mine, then I feel that the whole state of things is *somehow* wrong and topsy-turvy and *wicked.*" Her voice rose a little, every emphasis grew more passionate. "And if I don't do something — the little such a person as I can — to alter it before I die, I might as well never have lived."

Everybody at table started. Lord Maxwell looked at Miss Raeburn, his mouth twitching over the humour of his sister's dismay. Well! this was a forcible young woman: was Aldous the kind of man to be able to deal conveniently with such eyes, such emotions, such a personality?

Suddenly Lady Winterbourne's deep voice broke in:

"I never could say it half so well as that, Miss Boyce; but I agree with you. I may say that I have agreed with you all my life."

The girl turned to her, grateful and quivering.

"At the same time," said Lady Winterbourne, relapsing with a long breath from tragic emphasis into a fluttering indecision equally characteristic, "as you say, one is inconsistent. I was poor once, before Edward came to the title, and I did not at all like it — not at all. And I don't wish my daughters to marry poor men; and what I should do without a maid or a carriage when I wanted it, I cannot imagine. Edward makes the most of these things. He tells me I have to choose between things as they are, and a graduated income tax which would leave nobody — not even the richest — more than four hundred a year."

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"Just enough for one of those little houses on your station road," said Lord Maxwell, laughing at her. "I think you might still have a maid."

"There, you laugh," said Lady Winterbourne, vehemently: "the men do. But I tell you it is no laughing matter to feel that your *heart* and *conscience* have gone over to the enemy. You want to feel with your class, and you can't. Think of what used to happen in the old days. My grandmother, who was as good and kind a woman as ever lived, was driving home through our village one evening, and a man passed her, a labourer who was a little drunk, and who did not take off his hat to her. She stopped, made her men get down and had him put in the stocks there and then — the old stocks were still standing on the village green. Then she drove home to her dinner, and said her prayers no doubt that night with more consciousness than usual of having done her duty. But if the power of the stocks still remained to us, my dear friend" — and she laid her thin old woman's hand, flashing with diamonds, on Lord Maxwell's arm — "we could no longer do it, you or I. We have lost the sense of *right* in our place and position — at least I find I have. In the old days if there was social disturbance the upper class could put it down with a strong hand."

"So they would still," said Lord Maxwell, drily, "if there were violence. Once let it come to any real attack on property, and you will see where all these Socialist theories will be. And of course it will not be *we* — not the landowners or the capitalists — who will put it down. It will be the hundreds and thou-

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sands of people with something to lose — a few pounds in a joint-stock mill, a house of their own built through a co-operative store, an acre or two of land stocked by their own savings — it is they, I am afraid, who will put Miss Boyce's friends down so far as they represent any real attack on property — and brutally, too, I fear, if need be."

"I dare say," exclaimed Marcella, her colour rising again. "I never can see how we Socialists are to succeed. But how can any one *rejoice* in it? How can any one *wish* that the present state of things should go on? Oh! the horrors one sees in London. And down here, the cottages, and the starvation wages, and the ridiculous worship of game, and then, of course, the poaching — "

Miss Raeburn pushed back her chair with a sharp noise. But her brother was still peeling his pear, and no one else moved. Why did he let such talk go on? It was too unseemly.

Lord Maxwell only laughed. "My dear young lady," he said, much amused, "are you even in the frame of mind to make a hero of a poacher? Disillusion lies that way! — it does indeed. Why — Aldous! — I have been hearing such tales from Westall this morning. I stopped at Corbett's farm a minute or two on the way home, and met Westall at the gate coming out. He says he and his men are being harried to death round about Tudley End by a gang of men that come, he thinks, from Oxford, a driving gang with a gig, who come at night or in the early morning — the smartest rascals out, impossible to catch. But he says he thinks he will soon have his hand on the local

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accomplice — a Mellor man — a man named Hurd: not one of our labourers, I think."

"Hurd!" cried Marcella, in dismay. "Oh no, it *can't* be — impossible!"

Lord Maxwell looked at her in astonishment.

"Do you know any Hurds? I am afraid your father will find that Mellor is a bad place for poaching."

"If it is, it is because they are so starved and miserable," said Marcella, trying hard to speak coolly, but excited almost beyond bounds by the conversation and all that it implied. "And the Hurds — I don't believe it a bit! But if it were true — oh! they have been in such straits — they were out of work most of last winter; they are out of work now. No one *could* grudge them. I told you about them, didn't I?" she said, suddenly glancing at Aldous. "I was going to ask you to-day, if you could help them?" Her prophetess air had altogether left her. She felt ready to cry; and nothing could have been more womanish than her tone.

He bent across to her. Miss Raeburn, invaded by a new and intolerable sense of calamity, could have beaten him for what she read in his shining eyes, and in the flush on his usually pale cheek.

"Is he still out of work?" he said. "And you are unhappy about it? But I am sure we can find him work: I am just now planning improvements at the north end of the park. We can take him on; I am certain of it. You must give me his full name and address."

"And let him beware of Westall," said Lord Max-

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well, kindly. "Give him a hint, Miss Boyce, and nobody will rake up bygones. There is nothing I dislike so much as rows about the shooting. All the keepers know that."

"And of course," said Miss Raeburn, coldly, "if the family are in real distress there are plenty of people at hand to assist them. The man need not steal."

"Oh, charity!" cried Marcella, her lip curling.

"A worse crime than poaching, you think," said Lord Maxwell, laughing. "Well, these are big subjects. I confess, after my morning with the lunatics, I am half inclined, like Horace Walpole, to think everything serious ridiculous. At any rate shall we see what light a cup of coffee throws upon it? Agneta, shall we adjourn?"

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CHAPTER XI.

Lord Maxwell closed the drawing-room door behind Aldous and Marcella. Aldous had proposed to take their guest to see the picture gallery, which was on the first floor, and had found her willing.

The old man came back to the two other women, running his hand nervously through his shock of white hair — a gesture which Miss Raeburn well knew to show some disturbance of mind.

"I should like to have your opinion of that young lady," he said deliberately, taking a chair immediately in front of them.

"I like her," said Lady Winterbourne, instantly. "Of course she is crude and extravagant, and does not know quite what she may say. But all that will improve. I like her, and shall make friends with her."

Miss Raeburn threw up her hands in angry amazement.

"Most forward, conceited, and ill-mannered," she said with energy. "I am certain she has no proper principles, and as to what her religious views may be, I dread to think of them! If *that* is a specimen of the girls of the present day — "

"My dear," interrupted Lord Maxwell, laying a hand on her knee, "Lady Winterbourne is an old

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friend, a very old friend. I think we may be frank before her, and I don't wish you to say things you may regret. Aldous has made up his mind to get that girl to marry him, if he can."

Lady Winterbourne was silent, having in fact been forewarned by that odd little interview with Aldous in her own drawing-room, when he had suddenly asked her to call on Mrs. Boyce. But she looked at Miss Raeburn. That lady took up her knitting, laid it down again, resumed it, then broke out —

"How did it come about? Where have they been meeting?"

"At the Hardens mostly. He seems to have been struck from the beginning, and now there is no question as to his determination. But she may not have him; he professes to be still entirely in the dark."

"Oh!" cried Miss Raeburn, with a scornful shrug, meant to express all possible incredulity. Then she began to knit fast and furiously, and presently said in great agitation, —

"What can he be thinking of? She is very handsome, of course, but —" then her words failed her. "When Aldous remembers his mother, how can he? — undisciplined! self-willed! Why, she laid down the law to *you*, Henry, as though you had nothing to do but to take your opinions from a chit of a girl like her. Oh! no, no; I really can't; you must give me time. And her father — the disgrace and trouble of it! I tell you, Henry, it will bring misfortune!"

Lord Maxwell was much troubled. Certainly he should have talked to Agneta beforehand. But the

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fact was he had his cowardice, like other men, and he had been trusting to the girl herself, to this beauty he heard so much of, to soften the first shock of the matter to the present mistress of the Court.

"We will hope not, Agneta," he said gravely. "We will hope not. But you must remember Aldous is no boy. I cannot coerce him. I see the difficulties, and I have put them before him. But I am more favourably struck with the girl than you are. And anyway, if it comes about, we must make the best of it."

Miss Raeburn made no answer, but pretended to set her heel, her needles shaking. Lady Winterbourne was very sorry for her two old friends.

"Wait a little," she said, laying her hand lightly on Miss Raeburn's. "No doubt with her opinions she felt specially drawn to assert herself to-day. One can imagine it very well of a girl, and a generous girl in her position. You will see other sides of her, I am sure you will. And you would never — you could never — make a breach with Aldous."

"We must all remember," said Lord Maxwell, getting up and beginning to walk up and down beside them, "that Aldous is in no way dependent upon me. He has his own resources. He could leave us to-morrow. Dependent on me! It is the other way, I think, Agneta — don't you?"

He stopped and looked at her, and she returned his look in spite of herself. A tear dropped on her stocking which she hastily brushed away.

"Come, now," said Lord Maxwell, seating himself; "let us talk it over rationally. Don't go, Lady Winterbourne."

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"Why, they may be settling it at this moment," cried Miss Raeburn, half-choked, and feeling as though "the skies were impious not to fall."

"No, no!" he said smiling. "Not yet, I think. But let us prepare ourselves."

Meanwhile the cause of all this agitation was sitting languidly in a great Louis Quinze chair in the picture gallery upstairs, with Aldous beside her. She had taken off her big hat as though it oppressed her, and her black head lay against a corner of the chair in fine contrast to its mellowed golds and crimsons. Opposite to her were two famous Holbein portraits, at which she looked from time to time as though attracted to them in spite of herself, by some trained sense which could not be silenced. But she was not communicative, and Aldous was anxious.

"Do you think I was rude to your grandfather?" she asked him at last abruptly, cutting dead short some information she had stiffly asked him for just before, as to the date of the gallery and its collection.

"Rude!" he said startled. "Not at all. Not in the least. Do you suppose we are made of such brittle stuff, we poor landowners, that we can't stand an argument now and then?"

"Your aunt thought I was rude," she said unheeding. "I think I was. But a house like this excites me." And with a little reckless gesture she turned her head over her shoulder and looked down the gallery. A Velasquez was beside her; a great Titian over the way; a priceless Rembrandt beside it. On her right hand stood a chair of carved steel, presented by a

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German town to a German emperor, which had not its equal in Europe; the brocade draping the deep windows in front of her had been specially made to grace a state visit to the house of Charles II.

"At Mellor," she went on, "we are old and tumbledown. The rain comes in; there are no shutters to the big hall, and we can't afford to put them — we can't afford even to have the pictures cleaned. I can pity the house and nurse it, as I do the village. But here —"

And looking about her, she gave a significant shrug.

"What — our feathers again!" he said laughing. "But consider. Even you allow that Socialism cannot begin to-morrow. There must be a transition time, and clearly till the State is ready to take over the historical houses and their contents, the present nominal owners of them are bound, if they can, to take care of them. Otherwise the State will be some day defrauded."

She could not be insensible to the charm of his manner towards her. There was in it, no doubt, the natural force and weight of the man older and better informed than his companion, and amused every now and then by her extravagance. But even her irritable pride could not take offence. For the intellectual dissent she felt at bottom was tempered by a moral sympathy of which the gentleness and warmth touched and moved her in spite of herself. And now that they were alone he could express himself. So long as they had been in company he had seemed to her, as often before, shy, hesitating, and ineffective. But with the disappearance of spectators, who represented to him,

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no doubt, the harassing claim of the critical judgment, all was freer, more assured, more natural.

She leant her chin on her hand, considering his plea.

"Supposing you live long enough to see the State take it, shall you be able to reconcile yourself to it? Or shall you feel it a wrong, and go out a rebel?"

A delightful smile was beginning to dance in the dark eyes. She was recovering the tension of her talk with Lord Maxwell.

"All must depend, you see, on the conditions — on how you and your friends are going to manage the transition. You may persuade me — conceivably — or you may eject me with violence."

"Oh, no!" she interposed quickly. "There will be no violence. Only we shall gradually reduce your wages. Of course, we can't do without leaders — we don't want to do away with the captains of any industry, agricultural or manufacturing. Only we think you overpaid. You must be content with less."

"Don't linger out the process," he said laughing, "otherwise it will be painful. The people who are condemned to live in these houses before the Commune takes to them, while your graduated land and income taxes are slowly starving them out, will have a bad time of it."

"Well, it will be your first bad time! Think of the labourer now, with five children, of school age, on twelve shillings a week — think of the sweated women in London."

"Ah, think of them," he said in a different tone.

There was a pause of silence.

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"No!" said Marcella, springing up. "Don't let's think of them. I get to believe the whole thing a *pose* in myself and other people. Let's go back to the pictures. Do you think Titian 'sweated' his drapery men — paid them starvation rates, and grew rich on their labour? Very likely. All the same, that blue woman" — she pointed to a bending Magdalen — "will be a joy to all time."

They wandered through the gallery, and she was now all curiosity, pleasure, and intelligent interest, as though she had thrown off an oppression. Then they emerged into the upper corridor answering to the corridor of the antiques below. This also was hung with pictures, principally family portraits of the second order, dating back to the Tudors — a fine series of berobed and bejewelled personages, wherein clothes predominated and character was unimportant.

Marcella's eye was glancing along the brilliant colour of the wall, taking rapid note of jewelled necks surmounting stiff embroidered dresses, of the whiteness of lace ruffs, or the love-locks and gleaming satin of the Caroline beauties, when it suddenly occurred to her, —

"I shall be their successor. This is already potentially mine. In a few months, if I please, I shall be walking this house as mistress — its future mistress, at any rate!"

She was conscious of a quickening in the blood, a momentary blurring of the vision. A whirlwind of fancies swept across her. She thought of herself as the young peeress — Lord Maxwell after all was over seventy — her own white neck blazing with diamonds,

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the historic jewels of a great family — her will making law in this splendid house — in the great domain surrounding it. What power — what a position — what a romance! She, the out-at-elbows Marcella, the Socialist, the friend of the people. What new lines of social action and endeavour she might strike out! Miss Raeburn should not stop her. She caressed the thought of the scandals in store for that lady. Only it annoyed her that her dream of large things should be constantly crossed by this foolish delight, making her feet dance — in this mere prospect of satin gowns and fine jewels — of young and fêted beauty holding its brilliant court. If she made such a marriage, it should be, it must be, on public grounds. Her friends must have no right to blame her.

Then she stole a glance at the tall, quiet gentleman beside her. A man to be proud of from the beginning, and surely to be very fond of in time. "He would always be my friend," she thought. "I could lead him. He is very clever, one can see, and knows a great deal. But he admires what I like. His position hampers him — but I could help him to get beyond it. We might show the way to many!"

"Will you come and see this room here?" he said, stopping suddenly, yet with a certain hesitation in the voice. "It is my own sitting-room. There are one or two portraits I should like to show you if you would let me."

She followed him with a rosy cheek, and they were presently standing in front of the portrait of his mother. He spoke of his recollections of his parents, quietly and simply, yet she felt through every nerve

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that he was not the man to speak of such things to anybody in whom he did not feel a very strong and peculiar interest. As he was talking a rush of liking towards him came across her. How good he was — how affectionate beneath his reserve — a woman might securely trust him with her future.

So with every minute she grew softer, her eye gentler, and with each step and word he seemed to himself to be carried deeper into the current of joy. Intoxication was mounting within him, as her slim, warm youth moved and breathed beside him; and it was natural that he should read her changing behaviour for something other than it was. A man of his type asks for no advance from the woman; the woman he loves does not make them; but at the same time he has a natural self-esteem, and believes readily in his power to win the return he is certain he will deserve.

"And this?" she said, moving restlessly towards his table, and taking up the photograph of Edward Hallin.

"Ah! that is the greatest friend I have in the world. But I am sure you know the name. Mr. Hallin — Edward Hallin."

She paused bewildered.

"What! *the* Mr. Hallin — *that* was Edward Hallin — who settled the Nottingham strike last month — who lectures so much in the East End, and in the north?"

"The same. We are old college friends. I owe him much, and in all his excitements he does not forget old friends. There, you see —" and he opened a blotting book and pointed smiling to some closely written

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sheets lying within it — "is my last letter to him. I often write two of those in the week, and he to me. We don't agree on a number of things, but that doesn't matter."

"What can you find to write about?" she said wondering. "I thought nobody wrote letters nowadays, only notes. Is it books, or people?"

"Both, when it pleases us!" How soon, oh! ye favouring gods, might he reveal to her the part she herself played in those closely covered sheets? "But he writes to me on social matters chiefly. His whole heart, as you probably know, is in certain experiments and reforms in which he sometimes asks me to help him."

Marcella opened her eyes. These were new lights. She began to recall all that she had heard of young Hallin's position in the Labour movement; his personal magnetism and prestige; his power as a speaker. Her Socialist friends, she remembered, thought him in the way — a force, but a dangerous one. He was for the follies of compromise — could not be got to disavow the principle of private property, while ready to go great lengths in certain directions towards collective action and corporate control. The "stalwarts" of *her* sect would have none of him as a leader, while admitting his charm as a human being — a charm she remembered to have heard discussed with some anxiety among her Venturist friends. But for ordinary people he went far enough. Her father, she remembered, had dubbed him an "Anarchist" in connection with the terms he had been able to secure for the Nottingham strikers, as reported in the newspapers. It astonished

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her to come across the man again as Mr. Raeburn's friend.

They talked about Hallin a little, and about Aldous's Cambridge acquaintance with him. Then Marcella, still nervous, went to look at the bookshelves, and found herself in front of that working collection of books on economics which Aldous kept in his own room under his hand, by way of guide to the very fine special collection he was gradually making in the library downstairs.

Here again were surprises for her. Aldous had never made the smallest claim to special knowledge on all those subjects she had so often insisted on making him discuss. He had been always tentative and diffident, deferential even so far as her own opinions were concerned. And here already was the library of a student. All the books she had ever read or heard discussed were here — and as few among many. The condition of them, moreover, the signs of close and careful reading she noticed in them, as she took them out, abashed her: *she* had never learnt to read in this way. It was her first contact with an exact and arduous culture. She thought of how she had instructed Lord Maxwell at luncheon. No doubt he shared his grandson's interests. Her cheek burned anew; this time because it seemed to her that she had been ridiculous.

"I don't know why you never told me you took a particular interest in these subjects," she said suddenly, turning round upon him resentfully — she had just laid down, of all things, a volume of Venturist essays. "You must have thought I talked a great deal of nonsense at luncheon."

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"Why! — I have always been delighted to find you cared for such things and took an interest in them. How few women do!" he said quite simply, opening his eyes. "Do you know these three pamphlets? They were privately printed, and are very rare."

He took out a book and showed it to her as one does to a comrade and equal — as he might have done to Edward Hallin. But something was jarred in her — conscience or self-esteem — and she could not recover her sense of heroineship. She answered absently, and when he returned the book to the shelf she said that it was time for her to go, and would he kindly ask for her maid, who was to walk with her?

"I will ring for her directly," he said. "But you will let me take you home?" Then he added hurriedly, "I have some business this afternoon with a man who lives in your direction."

She assented a little stiffly — but with an inward thrill. His words and manner seemed suddenly to make the situation unmistakable. Among the books it had been for the moment obscured.

He rang for his own servant, and gave directions about the maid. Then they went downstairs that Marcella might say good-bye.

Miss Raeburn bade her guest farewell, with a dignity which her small person could sometimes assume, not unbecomingly. Lady Winterbourne held the girl's hand a little, looked her out of countenance, and insisted on her promising again to come to Winterbourne Park the following Tuesday. Then Lord Maxwell, with old-fashioned politeness, made Marcella take his arm through the hall.

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"You must come and see us again," he said smiling; "though we are such belated old Tories, we are not so bad as we sound."

And under cover of his mild banter he fixed a penetrating attentive look upon her. Flushed and embarrassed! Had it indeed been done already? or would Aldous settle it on this walk? To judge from his manner and hers, the thing was going with rapidity. Well, well, there was nothing for it but to hope for the best.

On their way through the hall she stopped him, her hand still in his arm. Aldous was in front, at the door, looking for a light shawl she had brought with her.

"I should like to thank you," she said shyly, "about the Hurds. It will be very kind of you and Mr. Raeburn to find them work."

Lord Maxwell was pleased; and with the usual unfair advantage of beauty her eyes and curving lips gave her little advance a charm infinitely beyond what any plainer woman could have commanded.

"Oh, don't thank me!" he said cheerily. "Thank Aldous. He does all that kind of thing. And if in your good works you want any help we can give, ask it, my dear young lady. My old comrade's granddaughter will always find friends in this house."

Lord Maxwell would have been very much astonished to hear himself making this speech six weeks before. As it was, he handed her over gallantly to Aldous, and stood on the steps looking after them in a stir of mind not unnoted by the confidential butler who held the door open behind him. Would Aldous

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insist on carrying his wife off to the dower house on the other side of the estate? or would they be content to stay in the old place with the old people? And if so, how were that girl and his sister to get on? As for himself, he was of a naturally optimist temper, and ever since the night of his first interview with Aldous on the subject, he had been more and more inclining to take a cheerful view. He liked to see a young creature of such evident character and cleverness holding opinions and lines of her own. It was infinitely better than mere nonentity. Of course, she was now extravagant and foolish, perhaps vain too. But that would mend with time — mend, above all, with her position as Aldous's wife. Aldous was a strong man — how strong, Lord Maxwell suspected that this impetuous young lady hardly knew. No, he thought the family might be trusted to cope with her when once they got her among them. And she would certainly be an ornament to the old house.

Her father of course was, and would be, the real difficulty, and the blight which had descended on the once honoured name. But a man so conscious of many kinds of power as Lord Maxwell could not feel much doubt as to his own and his grandson's competence to keep so poor a specimen of humanity as Richard Boyce in his place. How wretchedly ill, how feeble, both in body and soul, the fellow had looked when he and Winterbourne met him!

The white-haired owner of the Court walked back slowly to his library, his hands in his pockets, his head bent in cogitation. Impossible to settle to the various important political letters lying on his table,

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and bearing all of them on that approaching crisis in the spring which must put Lord Maxwell and his friends in power. He was over seventy, but his old blood quickened within him as he thought of those two on this golden afternoon, among the beech woods. How late Aldous had left all these experiences! His grandfather, by twenty, could have shown him the way.

Meanwhile the two in question were walking along the edge of the hill rampart overlooking the plain, with the road on one side of them, and the falling beech woods on the other. They were on a woodland path, just within the trees, sheltered, and to all intents and purposes alone. The maid, with leisurely discretion, was following far behind them on the high road.

Marcella, who felt at moments as though she could hardly breathe, by reason of a certain tumult of nerve, was yet apparently bent on maintaining a conversation without breaks. As they diverged from the road into the wood-path, she plunged into the subject of her companion's election prospects. How many meetings did he find that he must hold in the month? What places did he regard as his principal strongholds? She was told that certain villages, which she named, were certain to go Radical, whatever might be the Tory promises. As to a well-known Conservative League, which was very strong in the country, and to which all the great ladies, including Lady Winterbourne, belonged, was he actually going to demean himself by accepting its support? How was it possible to defend

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the bribery, buns, and beer by which it won its corrupting way?

Altogether, a quick fire of questions, remarks, and sallies, which Aldous met and parried as best he might, comforting himself all the time by thought of those deeper and lonelier parts of the wood which lay before them. At last she dropped out, half laughing, half defiant, words which arrested him, —

"Well, I shall know what the other side think of their prospects very soon. Mr. Wharton is coming to lunch with us to-morrow."

"Harry Wharton!" he said astonished. "But Mr. Boyce is not supporting him. Your father, I think, is Conservative?"

One of Dick Boyce's first acts as owner of Mellor, when social rehabilitation had still looked probable to him, had been to send a contribution to the funds of the League aforesaid, so that Aldous had public and conspicuous grounds for his remark.

"Need one measure everything by politics?" she asked him a little disdainfully. "Mayn't one even feed a Radical?"

He winced visibly a moment, touched in his philosopher's pride.

"You remind me," he said, laughing and reddening — "and justly — that an election perverts all one's standards and besmirches all one's morals. Then I suppose Mr. Wharton is an old friend?"

"Papa never saw him before last week," she said carelessly. "Now he talks of asking him to stay some time, and says that, although he won't vote for him, he hopes that he will make a good fight."

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Raeburn's brow contracted in a puzzled frown.

"He will make an excellent fight," he said rather shortly. "Dodgson hardly hopes to get in. Harry Wharton is a most taking speaker, a very clever fellow, and sticks at nothing in the way of promises. Ah, you will find him interesting, Miss Boyce! He has a co-operative farm on his Lincolnshire property. Last year he started a Labour paper — which I believe you read. I have heard you quote it. He believes in all that you hope for — great increase in local government and communal control — the land for the people — graduated income-tax — the extinction of landlord and capitalist as soon as may be — *e tutti quanti.* He talks with great eloquence and ability. In our villages I find he is making way every week. The people think his manners perfect. 'Ee *'as* a way wi' un,' said an old labourer to me last week. 'If 'ee wor to coe the wild birds, I do believe, Muster Raeburn, they'd coom to un!'"

"Yet you dislike him!" said Marcella, a daring smile dancing on the dark face she turned to him. "One can hear it in every word you say."

He hesitated, trying, even at the moment that an impulse of jealous alarm which astonished himself had taken possession of him, to find the moderate and measured phrase.

"I have known him from a boy," he said. "He is a connection of the Levens, and used to be always there in old days. He is very brilliant and very gifted —"

"Your 'but' must be very bad," she threw in, "it is so long in coming."

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"Then I will say, whatever opening it gives you," he replied with spirit, "that I admire him without respecting him."

"Who ever thought otherwise of a clever opponent?" she cried. "It is the stock formula."

The remark stung, all the more because Aldous was perfectly conscious that there was much truth in her implied charge of prejudice. He had never been very capable of seeing this particular man in the dry light of reason, and was certainly less so than before, since it had been revealed to him that Wharton and Mr. Boyce's daughter were to be brought, before long, into close neighbourhood.

"I am sorry that I seem to you such a Pharisee," he said, turning upon her a look which had both pain and excitement in it.

She was silent, and they walked on a few yards without speaking. The wood had thickened around them. The high road was no longer visible. No sound of wheels or footsteps reached them. The sun struck freely through the beech-trees, already half bared, whitening the grey trunks at intervals to an arrowy distinctness and majesty, or kindling the slopes of red and freshly fallen leaves below into great patches of light and flame. Through the stems, as always, the girdling blues of the plain, and in their faces a gay and buoyant breeze, speaking rather of spring than autumn. Robins, "yellow autumn's nightingales," sang in the hedge to their right. In the pause between them, sun, wind, birds made their charm felt. Nature, perpetual chorus as she is to man, stole in, urging, wooing, defining. Aldous's heart leapt to the spur of a sudden resolve.

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Instinctively she turned to him at the same moment as he to her, and seeing his look she paled a little.

"Do you guess at all why it hurts me to jar with you?" he said — finding his words in a rush, he did not know how — "Why every syllable of yours matters to me? It is because I have hopes — dreams — which have become my life! If you could accept this — this — feeling — this devotion — which has grown up in me — if you could trust yourself to me — you should have no cause, I think — ever — to think me hard or narrow towards any person, any enthusiasm for which you had sympathy. May I say to you all that is in my mind — or — or — am I presuming?"

She looked away from him, crimson again. A great wave of exultation — boundless, intoxicating — swept through her. Then it was checked by a nobler feeling — a quick, penitent sense of his nobleness.

"You don't know me," she said hurriedly: "you think you do. But I am all odds and ends. I should annoy — wound — disappoint you."

His quiet grey eyes flamed.

"Come and sit down here, on these dry roots," he said, taking already joyous command of her. "We shall be undisturbed. I have so much to say!"

She obeyed trembling. She felt no passion, but the strong thrill of something momentous and irreparable, together with a swelling pride — pride in such homage from such a man.

He led her a few steps down the slope, found a place for her against a sheltering trunk, and threw himself down beside her. As he looked up at the picture she made amid the autumn branches, at her

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bent head, her shy moved look, her white hand lying ungloved on her black dress, happiness overcame him. He took her hand, found she did not resist, drew it to him, and clasping it in both his, bent his brow, his lips upon it. It shook in his hold, but she was passive. The mixture of emotion and self-control she showed touched him deeply. In his chivalrous modesty he asked for nothing else, dreamt of nothing more.

Half an hour later they were still in the same spot. There had been much talk between them, most of it earnest, but some of it quite gay, broken especially by her smiles. Her teasing mood, however, had passed away. She was instead composed and dignified, like one conscious that life had opened before her to great issues.

Yet she had flinched often before that quiet tone of eager joy in which he had described his first impressions of her, his surprise at finding in her ideals, revolts, passions, quite unknown to him, so far, in the women of his own class. Naturally he suppressed, perhaps he had even forgotten, the critical amusement and irritation she had often excited in him. He remembered, he spoke only of sympathy, delight, pleasure — of his sense, as it were, of slaking some long-felt moral thirst at the well of her fresh feeling. So she had attracted him first, — by a certain strangeness and daring — by what she *said* —

"Now — and above all by what you *are!*" he broke out suddenly, moved out of his even speech. "Oh! it is too much to believe — to dream of! Put your hand in mine, and say again that it is really *true* that

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we two are to go forward together — that you will be always there to inspire — to help — "

And as she gave him the hand, she must also let him — in this first tremor of a pure passion — take the kiss which was now his by right. That she should flush and draw away from him as she did, seemed to him the most natural thing in the world, and the most maidenly.

Then, as their talk wandered on, bit by bit, he gave her all his confidence, and she had felt herself honoured in receiving it. She understood now at least something — a first fraction — of that inner life, masked so well beneath his quiet English capacity and unassuming manner. He had spoken of his Cambridge years, of his friend, of the desire of his heart to make his landowner's power and position contribute something towards that new and better social order, which he too, like Hallin — though more faintly and intermittently — believed to be approaching. The difficulties of any really new departure were tremendous; he saw them more plainly and more anxiously than Hallin. Yet he believed that he had thought his way to some effective reform on his grandfather's large estate, and to some useful work as one of a group of like-minded men in Parliament. She must have often thought him careless and apathetic towards his great trust. But he was not so — not careless — but paralysed often by intellectual difficulty, by the claims of conflicting truths.

She, too, explained herself most freely, most frankly. She would have nothing on her conscience.

"They will say, of course," she said with sudden

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nervous abruptness, "that I am marrying you for wealth and position. And in a sense I shall be. No! don't stop me! I should not marry you if—if—I did not like you. But you can give me—you have—great opportunities. I tell you frankly, I shall enjoy them and use them. Oh! do think well before you do it. I shall *never* be a meek, dependent wife. A woman, to my mind, is bound to cherish her own individuality sacredly, married or not married. Have you thought that I may often think it right to do things you disagree with, that may scandalise your relations?"

"You shall be free," he said steadily. "I have thought of it all."

"Then there is my father," she said, turning her head away. "He is ill—he wants pity, affection. I will accept no bond that forces me to disown him."

"Pity and affection are to me the most sacred things in the world," he said, kissing her hand gently. "Be content—be at rest—my beautiful lady!"

There was again silence, full of thought on her side, of heavenly happiness on his. The sun had sunk almost to the verge of the plain, the wind had freshened.

"We *must* go home," she said, springing up. "Taylor must have got there an hour ago. Mother will be anxious, and I must—I must tell them."

"I will leave you at the gate," he suggested as they walked briskly; "and you will ask your father, will you not, if I may see him to-night after dinner?"

The trees thinned again in front of them, and the path curved inward to the front. Suddenly a man,

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walking on the road, diverged into the path and came towards them. He was swinging a stick and humming. His head was uncovered, and his light chestnut curls were blown about his forehead by the wind. Marcella, looking up at the sound of the steps, had a sudden impression of something young and radiant, and Aldous stopped with an exclamation.

The new-comer perceived them, and at sight of Aldous smiled, and approached, holding out his hand.

"Why, Raeburn, I seem to have missed you twenty times a day this last fortnight. We have been always on each other's tracks without meeting. Yet I think, if we had met, we could have kept our tempers."

"Miss Boyce, I think you do not know Mr. Wharton," said Aldous, stiffly. "May I introduce you?"

The young man's blue eyes, all alert and curious at the mention of Marcella's name, ran over the girl's face and form. Then he bowed with a certain charming exaggeration — like an eighteenth-century beau with his hand upon his heart — and turned back with them a step or two towards the road.

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BOOK II.

"A woman has enough to govern wisely
Her own demeanours, passions and divisions."

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CHAPTER I.

On a certain night in the December following the engagement of Marcella Boyce to Aldous Raeburn, the woods and fields of Mellor, and all the bare rampart of chalk down which divides the Buckinghamshire plain from the forest upland of the Chilterns lay steeped in moonlight, and in the silence which belongs to intense frost.

Winter had set in before the leaf had fallen from the last oaks; already there had been a fortnight or more of severe cold, with hardly any snow. The pastures were delicately white; the ditches and the wet furrows in the ploughed land, the ponds on Mellor common, and the stagnant pool in the midst of the village, whence it drew its main water supply, were frozen hard. But the ploughed chalk land itself lay a dull grey beside the glitter of the pastures, and the woods under the bright sun of the days dropped their rime only to pass once more with the deadly cold of the night under the fantastic empire of the frost. Every day the veil of morning mist rose lightly from the woods, uncurtaining the wintry spectacle, and melting into the brilliant azure of an unflecked sky; every night the moon rose without a breath of wind, without a cloud; and all the branch-work of the trees, where they stood in the open fields, lay reflected clean

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and sharp on the whitened ground. The bitter cold stole into the cottages, marking the old and feeble with the touch of Azrael; while without, in the field solitudes, bird and beast cowered benumbed and starving in hole and roosting place.

How still it was — this midnight — on the fringe of the woods! Two men sitting concealed among some bushes at the edge of Mr. Boyce's largest cover, and bent upon a common errand, hardly spoke to each other, so strange and oppressive was the silence. One was Jim Hurd; the other was a labourer, a son of old Patton of the almshouses, himself a man of nearly sixty, with a small wizened face showing sharp and white to-night under his slouched hat.

They looked out over a shallow cup of treeless land to a further bound of wooded hill, ending towards the north in a bare bluff of down shining steep under the moon. They were in shadow, and so was most of the wide dip of land before them; but through a gap to their right, beyond the wood, the moonbeams poured, and the farms nestling under the opposite ridge, the plantations ranging along it, and the bald beacon hill in which it broke to the plain, were all in radiant light.

Not a stir of life anywhere. Hurd put up his hand to his ear, and leaning forward listened intently. Suddenly — a vibration, a dull thumping sound in the soil of the bank immediately beside him. He started, dropped his hand, and, stooping, laid his ear to the ground.

"Gi' us the bag," he said to his companion, drawing himself upright. "You can hear 'em turnin' and

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creepin' as plain as anything. Now then, you take these and go t' other side."

He handed over a bundle of rabbit nets. Patton, crawling on hands and knees, climbed over the low overgrown bank on which the hedge stood into the precincts of the wood itself. The state of the hedge, leaving the cover practically open and defenceless along its whole boundary, showed plainly enough that it belonged to the Mellor estate. But the field beyond was Lord Maxwell's.

Hurd applied himself to netting the holes on his own side, pushing the brambles and undergrowth aside with the sure hand of one who had already reconnoitred the ground. Then he crept over to Patton to see that all was right on the other side, came back, and went for the ferrets, of whom he had four in a closely tied bag.

A quarter of an hour of intense excitement followed. In all, five rabbits bolted — three on Hurd's side, two on Patton's. It was all the two men could do to secure their prey, manage the ferrets, and keep a watch on the holes. Hurd's great hands — now fixing the pegs that held the nets, now dealing death to the entangled rabbit, whose neck he broke in an instant by a turn of the thumb, now winding up the line that held the ferret — seemed to be everywhere.

At last a ferret "laid up," the string attached to him having either slipped or broken, greatly to the disgust of the men, who did not want to be driven either to dig, which made a noise and took time, or to lose their animal. The rabbits made no more sign, and it was tolerably evident that they had got

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as much as they were likely to get out of that particular "bury."

Hurd thrust his arm deep into the hole where he had put the ferret. "Ther's summat in the way," he declared at last. "Mos' likely a dead un. Gi' me the spade."

He dug away the mouth of the hole, making as little noise as possible, and tried again.

"'Ere ee be," he cried, clutching at something, drew it out, exclaimed in disgust, flung it away, and pounced upon a rabbit which on the removal of the obstacle followed like a flash, pursued by the lost ferret. Hurd caught the rabbit by the neck, held it by main force, and killed it; then put the ferret into his pocket. "Lord!" he said, wiping his brow, "they do come suddent."

What he had pulled out was a dead cat; a wretched puss, who on some happy hunt had got itself wedged in the hole, and so perished there miserably. He and Patton stooped over it wondering; then Hurd walked some paces along the bank, looking warily out to the right of him across the open country all the time. He threw the poor malodorous thing far into the wood and returned.

The two men lit their pipes under the shelter of the bushes, and rested a bit, well hidden, but able to see out through a break in the bit of thicket.

"Six on 'em," said Hurd, looking at the stark creatures beside him. "I be too done to try another bury. I'll set a snare or two, an' be off home."

Patton puffed silently. He was wondering whether Hurd would give him one rabbit or two. Hurd had

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both "plant" and skill, and Patton would have been glad enough to come for one. Still he was a plaintive man with a perpetual grievance, and had already made up his mind that Hurd would treat him shabbily to-night, in spite of many past demonstrations that his companion was on the whole of a liberal disposition.

"You bin out workin' a day's work already, han't yer?" he said presently. He himself was out of work, like half the village, and had been presented by his wife with boiled swede for supper. But he knew that Hurd had been taken on at the works at the Court, where the new drive was being made, and a piece of ornamental water enlarged and improved — mainly for the sake of giving employment in bad times. He, Patton, and some of his mates, had tried to get a job there. But the steward had turned them back. The men off the estate had first claim, and there was not room for all of them. Yet Hurd had been taken on, which had set people talking.

Hurd nodded, and said nothing. He was not disposed to be communicative on the subject of his employment at the Court.

"An' it be true as *she* be goin' to marry Muster Raeburn?"

Patton jerked his head towards the right, where above a sloping hedge the chimneys of Mellor and the tops of the Mellor cedars, some two or three fields away, showed distinct against the deep night blue.

Hurd nodded again, and smoked diligently. Patton, nettled by this parsimony of speech, made the inward comment that his companion was "a deep un."

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The village was perfectly aware of the particular friendship shown by Miss Boyce to the Hurds. He was goaded into trying a more stinging topic.

"Westall wor braggin' last night at Bradsell's" — (Bradsell was the landlord of "The Green Man" at Mellor) — "ee said as how they'd taken you on at the Court — but that didn't prevent 'em knowin' as you was a bad lot. Ee said *ee* 'ad 'is eye on yer — ee 'ad warned yer twoice last year — "

"That's a lie!" said Hurd, removing his pipe an instant and putting it back again.

Patton looked more cheerful.

"Well, ee spoke cru'l. Ee was certain, ee said, as you could tell a thing or two about them coverts at Tudley End, if the treuth were known. You wor allus a loafer, an' a loafer you'd be. Yer might go snivellin' to Miss Boyce, ee said, but yer wouldn't do no honest work — ee said — not if yer could help it — that's what ee said."

"Devil!" said Hurd between his teeth, with a quick lift of all his great misshapen chest. He took his pipe out of his mouth, rammed it down fiercely with his thumb, and put it in his pocket.

"Look out!" exclaimed Patton with a start.

A whistle! — clear and distinct — from the opposite side of the hollow. Then a man's figure, black and motionless an instant on the whitened down, with a black speck beside it; lastly, another figure higher up along the hill, in quick motion towards the first, with other specks behind it. The poachers instantly understood that it was Westall — whose particular beat lay in this part of the estate — signalling to his

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night watcher, Charlie Dynes, and that the two men would be on them in no time. It was the work of a few seconds to efface as far as possible the traces of their raid, to drag some thick and trailing brambles which hung near over the mouth of the hole where there had been digging, to catch up the ferrets and game, and to bid Hurd's lurcher to come to heel. The two men crawled up the ditch with their burdens as far away to leeward as they could get from the track by which the keepers would cross the field. The ditch was deeply overgrown, and when the approaching voices warned them to lie close, they crouched under a dense thicket of brambles and overhanging bushes, afraid of nothing but the noses of the keepers' dogs.

Dogs and men, however, passed unsuspecting.

"Hold still!" said Hurd, checking Patton's first attempt to move. "Ee'll be back again mos' like. It's 'is dodge."

And sure enough in twenty minutes or so the men reappeared. They retraced their steps from the further corner of the field, where some preserves of Lord Maxwell's approached very closely to the big Mellor wood, and came back again along the diagonal path within fifty yards or so of the men in the ditch.

In the stillness the poachers could hear Westall's harsh and peremptory voice giving some orders to his underling, or calling to the dogs, who had scattered a little in the stubble. Hurd's own dog quivered beside him once or twice.

Then steps and voices faded into the distance and all was safe.

The poachers crept out grinning, and watched the

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keepers' progress along the hill-face, till they disappeared into the Maxwell woods.

"*Ee* be sold again — blast 'im!" said Hurd, with a note of quite disproportionate exultation in his queer, cracked voice. "Now I'll set them snares. But you'd better git home."

Patton took the hint, gave a grunt of thanks as his companion handed him two rabbits, which he stowed away in the capacious pockets of his poacher's coat, and slouched off home by as sheltered and roundabout a way as possible.

Hurd, left to himself, stowed his nets and other apparatus in a hidden crevice of the bank, and strolled along to set his snares in three hare-runs, well known to him, round the further side of the wood.

Then he waited impatiently for the striking of the clock in Mellor church. The cold was bitter, but his night's work was not over yet, and he had had very good reasons for getting rid of Patton.

Almost immediately the bell rang out, the echo rolling round the bend of the hills in the frosty silence. Half-past twelve Hurd scrambled over the ditch, pushed his way through the dilapidated hedge, and began to climb the ascent of the wood. The outskirts of it were filled with a thin mixed growth of sapling and underwood, but the high centre of it was crowned by a grove of full-grown beeches, through which the moon, now at its height, was playing freely, as Hurd clambered upwards amid the dead leaves just freshly strewn, as though in yearly festival, about their polished trunks. Such infinite grace and strength in the line work of the branches! —

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branches not bent into gnarled and unexpected fantasies, like those of the oak, but gathered into every conceivable harmony of upward curve and sweep, rising all together, black against the silvery light, each tree related to and completing its neighbour, as though the whole wood, so finely rounded on itself and to the hill, were but one majestic conception of a master artist.

But Hurd saw nothing of this as he plunged through the leaves. He was thinking that it was extremely likely a man would be on the look-out for him to-night under the big beeches — a man with some business to propose to him. A few words dropped in his ear at a certain public-house the night before had seemed to him to mean this, and he had accordingly sent Patton out of the way.

But when he got to the top of the hill no one was to be seen or heard, and he sat him down on a fallen log to smoke and wait awhile.

He had no sooner, however, taken his seat than he shifted it uneasily, turning himself round so as to look in the other direction. For in front of him, as he was first placed, there was a gap in the trees, and over the lower wood, plainly visible and challenging attention, rose the dark mass of Mellor House. And the sight of Mellor suggested reflections just now that were not particularly agreeable to Jim Hurd.

He had just been poaching Mr. Boyce's rabbits without any sort of scruple. But the thought of *Miss* Boyce was not pleasant to him when he was out on these nightly raids.

Why had she meddled? He bore her a queer sort

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of grudge for it. He had just settled down to the bit of cobbling which, together with his wife's plait, served him for a blind, and was full of a secret excitement as to various plans he had in hand for "doing" Westall, combining a maximum of gain for the winter with a maximum of safety, when Miss Boyce walked in, radiant with the news that there was employment for him at the Court, on the new works, whenever he liked to go and ask for it.

And then she had given him an odd look.

"And I was to pass you on a message from Lord Maxwell, Hurd," she had said: "'You tell him to keep out of Westall's way for the future, and bygones shall be bygones.' Now, I'm not going to ask what that means. If you've been breaking some of our landlords' law, I'm not going to say I'm shocked. I'd alter the law to-morrow, if I could! — you know I would. But I do say you're a fool if you go on with it, now you've got good work for the winter; you must please remember your wife and children."

And there he had sat like a log, staring at her — both he and Minta not knowing where to look, or how to speak. Then at last his wife had broken out, crying:

"Oh, miss! we should ha starved — "

And Miss Boyce had stopped her in a moment, catching her by the hand. Didn't she know it? Was she there to preach to them? Only Hurd must promise not to do it any more, for his wife's sake.

And he — stammering — left without excuse or resource, either against her charge, or the work she offered him — had promised her, and promised her,

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moreover — in his trepidation — with more fervency than he at all liked to remember.

For about a fortnight, perhaps, he had gone to the Court by day, and had kept indoors by night. Then, just as the vagabond passions, the Celtic instincts, so long repressed, so lately roused, were goading at him again, he met Westall in the road — Westall, who looked him over from top to toe with an insolent smile, as much as to say, "Well, my man, we've got the whip hand of you now!" That same night he crept out again in the dark and the early morning, in spite of all Minta's tears and scolding.

Well, what matter? As towards the rich and the law, he had the morals of the slave, who does not feel that he has had any part in making the rules he is expected to keep, and breaks them when he can with glee. It made him uncomfortable, certainly, that Miss Boyce should come in and out of their place as she did, should be teaching Willie to read, and bringing her old dresses to make up for Daisy and Nellie, while he was making a fool of her in this way. Still he took it all as it came. One sensation wiped out another.

Besides, Miss Boyce had, after all, much part in this double life of his. Whenever he was at home, sitting over the fire with a pipe, he read those papers and things she had brought him in the summer. He had not taken much notice of them at first. Now he spelled them out again and again. He had always thought "them rich people took advantage of yer." But he had never supposed, somehow, they were such thieves, such mean thieves, as it appeared they were.

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A curious ferment filled his restless, inconsequent brain. The poor were downtrodden, but they were coming to their rights. The land and its creatures were for the people! not for the idle rich. Above all, Westall was a devil, and must be put down. For the rest, if he could have given words to experience, he would have said that since he began to go out poaching he had burst his prison and found himself. A life which was not merely endurance pulsed in him. The scent of the night woods, the keenness of the night air, the tracks and ways of the wild creatures, the wiles by which he slew them, the talents and charms of his dog Bruno — these things had developed in him new aptitudes both of mind and body, which were in themselves exhilaration. He carried his dwarf's frame more erect, breathed from an ampler chest. As for his work at the Court, he thought of it often with impatience and disgust. It was a more useful blind than his cobbling, or he would have shammed illness and got quit of it.

"Them were sharp uns that managed that business at Tudley End!" He fell thinking about it and chuckling over it as he smoked. Two of Westall's best coverts swept almost clear just before the big shoot in November! — and all done so quick and quiet, before you could say "Jack Robinson." Well, there was plenty more yet, more woods, and more birds. There were those coverts down there, on the Mellor side of the hollow — they had been kept for the last shoot in January. Hang him! why wasn't that fellow up to time?

But no one came, and he must sit on, shivering and

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smoking, a sack across his shoulders. As the stir of nerve and blood caused by the ferreting subsided, his spirits began to sink. Mists of Celtic melancholy, perhaps of Celtic superstition, gained upon him. He found himself glancing from side to side, troubled by the noises in the wood. A sad light wind crept about the trunks like a whisper; the owls called overhead; sometimes there was a sudden sharp rustle or fall of a branch that startled him. Yet he knew every track, every tree in that wood. Up and down that field outside he had followed his father at the plough, a little sickly object of a lad, yet seldom unhappy, so long as childhood lasted, and his mother's temper could be fled from, either at school or in the fields. Under that boundary hedge to the right he had lain stunned and bleeding all a summer afternoon, after old Westall had thrashed him, his heart scorched within him by the sense of wrong and the craving for revenge. On that dim path leading down the slope of the wood, George Westall had once knocked him down for disturbing a sitting pheasant. He could see himself falling — the tall, powerful lad standing over him with a grin.

Then, inconsequently, he began to think of his father's death. He made a good end did the old man. "Jim, my lad, the Lord's verra merciful," or "Jim, you'll look after Ann." Ann was the only daughter. Then a sigh or two, and a bit of sleep, and it was done.

And everybody must go the same way, must come to the same stopping of the breath, the same awfulness — in a life of blind habit — of a moment that

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never had been before and never could be again? He did not put it to these words, but the shudder that is in the thought for all of us, seized him. He was very apt to think of dying, to ponder in his secret heart *how* it would be, and when. And always it made him very soft towards Minta and the children. Not only did the *life* instinct cling to them, to the warm human hands and faces hemming him in and protecting him from that darkness beyond with its shapes of terror. But to think of himself as sick, and gasping to his end, like his father, was to put himself back in his old relation to his wife, when they were first married. He might cross Minta now, but if he came to lie sick, he could see himself there, in the future, following her about with his eyes, and thanking her, and doing all she told him, just as he'd used to do. He couldn't die without her to help him through. The very idea of her being taken first, roused in him a kind of spasm — a fierceness, a clenching of the hands. But all the same, in this poaching matter, he must have his way, and she must just get used to it.

Ah! a low whistle from the further side of the wood. He replied, and was almost instantly joined by a tall slouching youth, by day a blacksmith's apprentice at Gairsley, the Maxwells' village, who had often brought him information before.

The two sat talking for ten minutes or so on the log. Then they parted; Hurd went back to the ditch where he had left the game, put two rabbits into his pockets, left the other two to be removed in the morning when he came to look at his snares, and went off home, keeping as much as possible in the shelter of

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the hedges. On one occasion he braved the moonlight and the open field, rather than pass through a woody corner where an old farmer had been found dead some six years before. Then he reached a deep lane leading to the village, and was soon at his own door.

As he climbed the wooden ladder leading to the one bedroom where he, his wife, and his four children slept, his wife sprang up in bed.

"Jim, you must be perished — such a night as 't is. Oh, Jim — where ha' you bin?"

She was a miserable figure in her coarse nightgown, with her grizzling hair wild about her, and her thin arms nervously outstretched along the bed. The room was freezing cold, and the moonlight stealing through the scanty bits of curtains brought into dismal clearness the squalid bed, the stained walls, and bare uneven floor. On an iron bedstead, at the foot of the large bed, lay Willie, restless and coughing, with the elder girl beside him fast asleep; the other girl lay beside her mother, and the wooden box with rockers, which held the baby, stood within reach of Mrs. Hurd's arm.

He made her no answer, but went to look at the coughing boy, who had been in bed for a week with bronchitis.

"You've never been and got in Westall's way again?" she said anxiously. "It's no good my tryin' to get a wink o' sleep when you're out like this."

"Don't you worrit yourself," he said to her, not roughly, but decidedly. "I'm all right. This boy 's bad, Minta."

"Yes, an' I kep' up the fire an' put the spout on the

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kettle, too." She pointed to the grate and to the thin line of steam, which was doing its powerless best against the arctic cold of the room.

Hurd bent over the boy and tried to put him comfortable. The child, weak and feverish, only began to cry — a hoarse bronchial crying, which threatened to wake the baby. He could not be stopped, so Hurd made haste to take off his own coat and boots, and then lifted the poor soul in his arms.

"You'll be quiet, Will, and go sleep, won't yer, if daddy takes keer on you?"

He wrapped his own coat round the little fellow, and lying down beside his wife, took him on his arm and drew the thin brown blankets over himself and his charge. He himself was warm with exercise, and in a little while the huddling creatures on either side of him were warm too. The quick, panting breath of the boy soon showed that he was asleep. His father, too, sank almost instantly into deep gulfs of sleep. Only the wife — nervous, overdone, and possessed by a thousand fears — lay tossing and wakeful hour after hour, while the still glory of the winter night passed by.

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CHAPTER II.

"WELL, Marcella, have you and Lady Winterbourne arranged your classes?"

Mrs. Boyce was stooping over a piece of needlework beside a window in the Mellor drawing-room, trying to catch the rapidly failing light. It was one of the last days of December. Marcella had just come in from the village rather early, for they were expecting a visitor to arrive about tea time, and had thrown herself, tired, into a chair near her mother.

"We have got about ten or eleven of the younger women to join; none of the old ones will come," said Marcella. "Lady Winterbourne has heard of a capital teacher from Dunstable, and we hope to get started next week. There is money enough to pay wages for three months."

In spite of her fatigue, her eye was bright and restless. The energy of thought and action from which she had just emerged still breathed from every limb and feature.

"Where have you got the money?"

"Mr. Raeburn has managed it," said Marcella, briefly.

Mrs. Boyce gave a slight shrug of the shoulders.

"And afterwards — what is to become of your product?"

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"There is a London shop Lady Winterbourne knows will take what we make if it turns out well. Of course, we don't expect to pay our way."

Marcella gave her explanations with a certain stiffness of self-defence. She and Lady Winterbourne had evolved a scheme for reviving and improving the local industry of straw-plaiting, which after years of decay seemed now on the brink of final disappearance. The village women who could at present earn a few pence a week by the coarser kinds of work were to be instructed, not only in the finer and better paid sorts, but also in the making up of the plait when done, and the "blocking" of hats and bonnets — processes hitherto carried on exclusively at one or two large local centres.

"You don't expect to pay your way?" repeated Mrs. Boyce. "What, never?"

"Well, we shall give twelve to fourteen shillings a week wages. We shall find the materials, and the room — and prices are very low, the whole trade depressed."

Mrs. Boyce laughed.

"I see. How many workers do you expect to get together?"

"Oh! eventually, about two hundred in the three villages. It will regenerate the whole life!" said Marcella, a sudden ray from the inner warmth escaping her, against her will.

Mrs. Boyce smiled again, and turned her work so as to see it better.

"Does Aldous understand what you are letting him in for?"

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Marcella flushed.

"Perfectly. It is 'ransom' — that's all."

"And he is ready to take your view of it?"

"Oh, he thinks us economically unsound, of course," said Marcella, impatiently. "So we are. All care for the human being under the present state of things is economically unsound. But he likes it no more than I do."

"Well, lucky for you he has a long purse," said Mrs. Boyce, lightly. "But I gather, Marcella, you don't insist upon his spending it *all* on straw-plaiting. He told me yesterday he had taken the Hertford Street house."

"We shall live quite simply," said Marcella, quickly.

"What, no carriage?"

Marcella hesitated.

"A carriage saves time. And if one goes about much, it does not cost so much more than cabs."

"So you mean to go about much? Lady Winterbourne talks to me of presenting you in May."

"That's Miss Raeburn," cried Marcella. "She says I must, and all the family would be scandalised if I didn't go. But you can't imagine —"

She stopped and took off her hat, pushing the hair back from her forehead. A look of worry and excitement had replaced the radiant glow of her first resting moments.

"That you like it?" said Mrs. Boyce, bluntly. "Well, I don't know. Most young women like pretty gowns, and great functions, and prominent positions. I don't call you an ascetic, Marcella."

Marcella winced.

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"One has to fit oneself to circumstances," she said proudly. "One may hate the circumstances, but one can't escape them."

"Oh, I don't think you will hate your circumstances, my dear! You would be very foolish if you did. Have you heard finally how much the settlement is to be?"

"No," said Marcella, shortly. "I have not asked papa, nor anybody."

"It was only settled this morning. Your father told me hurriedly as he went out. You are to have two thousand a year of your own."

The tone was dry, and the speaker's look as she turned towards her daughter had in it a curious hostility; but Marcella did not notice her mother's manner.

"It is too much," she said in a low voice.

She had thrown back her head against the chair in which she sat, and her half-troubled eyes were wandering over the darkening expanse of lawn and avenue.

"He said he wished you to feel perfectly free to live your own life, and to follow out your own projects. Oh, for a person of projects, my dear, it is not so much. You will do well to husband it. Keep it for yourself. Get what *you* want out of it: not what other people want."

Again Marcella's attention missed the note of agitation in her mother's sharp manner. A soft look — a look of compunction — passed across her face. Mrs. Boyce began to put her working things away, finding it too dark to do any more.

"By the way," said the mother, suddenly, "I sup-

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pose you will be going over to help him in his canvassing this next few weeks? Your father says the election will be certainly in February."

Marcella moved uneasily.

"He knows," she said at last, "that I don't agree with him in so many things. He is so full of this Peasant Proprietors Bill. And I hate peasant properties. They are nothing but a step backwards."

Mrs. Boyce lifted her eyebrows.

"That's unlucky. He tells me it is likely to be his chief work in the new Parliament. Isn't it, on the whole, probable that he knows more about the country than you do, Marcella?"

Marcella sat up with sudden energy and gathered her walking things together.

"It isn't knowledge that's the question, mamma; it's the principle of the thing. *I* mayn't know anything, but the people whom I follow know. There are the two sides of thought — the two ways of looking at things. I warned Aldous when he asked me to marry him which I belonged to. And he accepted it."

Mrs. Boyce's thin fine mouth curled a little.

"So you suppose that Aldous had his wits about him on that great occasion as much as you had?"

Marcella first started, then quivered with nervous indignation.

"Mother," she said, "I can't bear it. It's not the first time that you have talked as though I had taken some unfair advantage — made an unworthy bargain. It is too hard too. Other people may think what they like, but that you —"

Her voice failed her, and the tears came into her

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eyes. She was tired and over-excited, and the contrast between the atmosphere of flattery and consideration which surrounded her in Aldous's company, in the village, or at the Winterbournes, and this tone which her mother so often took with her when they were alone, was at the moment hardly to be endured.

Mrs. Boyce looked up more gravely.

"You misunderstand me, my dear," she said quietly. "I allow myself to wonder at you a little, but I think no hard things of you ever. I believe you like Aldous."

"Really, mamma!" cried Marcella, half hysterically.

Mrs. Boyce had by now rolled up her work and shut her workbasket.

"If you are going to take off your things," she said, "please tell William that there will be six or seven at tea. You said, I think, that Mr. Raeburn was going to bring Mr. Hallin?"

"Yes, and Frank Leven is coming. When will Mr. Wharton be here?"

"Oh, in ten minutes or so, if his train is punctual. I hear your father just coming in."

Marcella went away, and Mrs. Boyce was left a few minutes alone. Her thin hands lay idle a moment on her lap, and leaning towards the window beside her, she looked out an instant into the snowy twilight. Her mind was full of its usual calm scorn for those — her daughter included — who supposed that the human lot was to be mended by a rise in weekly wages, or that suffering has any necessary dependence on the amount of commodities of which a man disposes.

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What hardship is there in starving and scrubbing and toiling? Had she ever seen a labourer's wife scrubbing her cottage floor without envy, without moral thirst? Is it these things that kill, or any of the great simple griefs and burdens? Doth man live by bread alone? The whole language of social and charitable enthusiasm often raised in her a kind of exasperation.

So Marcella would be rich, excessively rich, even now. Outside the amount settled upon her, the figures of Aldous Raeburn's present income, irrespective of the inheritance which would come to him on his grandfather's death, were a good deal beyond what even Mr. Boyce — upon whom the daily spectacle of the Maxwell wealth exercised a certain angering effect — had supposed.

Mrs. Boyce had received the news of the engagement with astonishment, but her after-acceptance of the situation had been marked by all her usual philosophy. Probably behind the philosophy there was much secret relief. Marcella was provided for. Not the fondest or most contriving mother could have done more for her than she had at one stroke done for herself. During the early autumn Mrs. Boyce had experienced some moments of sharp prevision as to what her future relations might be towards this strong and restless daughter, so determined to conquer a world her mother had renounced. Now all was clear, and a very shrewd observer could allow her mind to play freely with the ironies of the situation.

As to Aldous Raeburn, she had barely spoken to

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him before the day when Marcella announced the engagement, and the lover a few hours later had claimed her daughter at the mother's hands with an emotion to which Mrs. Boyce found her usual difficulty in responding. She had done her best, however, to be gracious and to mask her surprise that he should have proposed, that Lord Maxwell should have consented, and that Marcella should have so lightly fallen a victim. One surprise, however, had to be confessed, at least to herself. After her interview with her future son-in-law, Mrs. Boyce realised that for the first time for fifteen years she was likely to admit a new friend. The impression made upon him by her own singular personality had translated itself in feelings and language which, against her will as it were, established an understanding, an affinity. That she had involuntarily aroused in him the profoundest and most chivalrous pity was plain to her. Yet for the first time in her life she did not resent it; and Marcella watched her mother's attitude with a mixture of curiosity and relief.

Then followed talk of an early wedding, communications from Lord Maxwell to Mr. Boyce of a civil and formal kind, a good deal more notice from the "county," and finally this definite statement from Aldous Raeburn as to the settlement he proposed to make upon his wife, and the joint income which he and she would have immediately at their disposal.

Under all these growing and palpable evidences of Marcella's future wealth and position, Mrs. Boyce had shown her usual restless and ironic spirit. But of late, and especially to-day, restlessness had become

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oppression. While Marcella was so speedily to become the rich and independent woman, they themselves, Marcella's mother and father, were very poor, in difficulties even, and likely to remain so. She gathered from her husband's grumbling that the provision of a suitable trousseau for Marcella would tax his resources to their utmost. How long would it be before they were dipping in Marcella's purse? Mrs. Boyce's self-tormenting soul was possessed by one of those nightmares her pride had brought upon her in grim succession during these fifteen years. And this pride, strong towards all the world, was nowhere so strong or so indomitable, at this moment, as towards her own daughter. They were practically strangers to each other; and they jarred. To inquire where the fault lay would have seemed to Mrs. Boyce futile.

Darkness had come on fast, and Mrs. Boyce was in the act of ringing for lights when her husband entered.

"Where's Marcella?" he asked as he threw himself into a chair with the air of irritable fatigue which was now habitual to him.

"Only gone to take off her things and tell William about tea. She will be down directly."

"Does she know about that settlement?"

"Yes, I told her. She thought it generous, but not — I think — unsuitable. The world cannot be reformed on nothing."

"Reformed! — fiddlesticks!" said Mr. Boyce, angrily. "I never saw a girl with a head so full of nonsense in my life. Where does she get it from?

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Why did you let her go about in London with those people? She may be spoilt for good. Ten to one she'll make a laughing stock of herself and everybody belonging to her, before she's done."

"Well, that is Mr. Raeburn's affair. I think I should take him into account more than Marcella does, if I were she. But probably she knows best."

"Of course she does. He has lost his head; any one can see that. While she is in the room, he is like a man possessed. It doesn't sit well on that kind of fellow. It makes him ridiculous. I told him half the settlement would be ample. She would only spend the rest on nonsense."

"You told him that?"

"Yes, I did. Oh!"—with an angry look at her—"I suppose you thought I should want to sponge upon her? I am as much obliged to you as usual!"

A red spot rose in his wife's thin cheek. But she turned and answered him gently, so gently that he had the rare sensation of having triumphed over her. He allowed himself to be mollified, and she stood there over the fire, chatting with him for some time, a friendly natural note in her voice which was rare and, insensibly, soothed him like an opiate. She chatted about Marcella's trousseau gowns, detailing her own contrivances for economy; about the probable day of the wedding, the latest gossip of the election, and so on. He sat shading his eyes from the fire-light, and now and then throwing in a word or two. The inmost soul of him was very piteous, harrowed often by a new dread—the dread of dying. The woman beside him held him in the hollow of her

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hand. In the long wrestle between her nature and his, she had conquered. His fear of her and his need of her had even come to supply the place of a dozen ethical instincts he was naturally without.

Some discomfort, probably physical, seemed at last to break up his moment of rest.

"Well, I tell you, I often wish it were the other man," he said, with some impatience. "Raeburn's so d——d superior. I suppose I offended him by what I said of Marcella's whims, and the risk of letting her control so much money at her age, and with her ideas. You never saw such an air!—all very quiet, of course. He buttoned his coat and got up to go, as though I were no more worth considering than the table. Neither he nor his precious grandfather need alarm themselves: I shan't trouble them as a visitor. If I shock them, they bore me—so we're quits. Marcella'll have to come here if she wants to see her father. But owing to your charming system of keeping her away from us all her childhood, she's not likely to want."

"You mean Mr. Wharton by the other man?" said Mrs. Boyce, not defending herself or Aldous.

"Yes, of course. But he came on the scene just too late, worse luck! Why wouldn't he have done just as well? He's as mad as she—madder. He believes all the rubbish she does—talks such *rot*, the people tell me, in his meetings. But then he's good company—he amuses you—you don't need to be on your p's and q's with *him*. Why wouldn't she have taken up with him? As far as money goes they could have rubbed along. *He's* not the man to starve when there are game-pies going. It's just bad luck."

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Mrs. Boyce smiled a little.

"What there is to make you suppose that she would have inclined to him, I don't exactly see. She has been taken up with Mr. Raeburn, really, from the first week of her arrival here."

"Well, I dare say — there was no one else," said her husband, testily. "That's natural enough. It's just what I say. All I know is, Wharton shall be free to use this house just as he pleases during his canvassing, whatever the Raeburns may say."

He bent forward and poked the somewhat sluggish fire with a violence which hindered rather than helped it. Mrs. Boyce's smile had quite vanished. She perfectly understood all that was implied, whether in his instinctive dislike of Aldous Raeburn, or in his cordiality towards young Wharton.

After a minute's silence, he got up again and left the room, walking, as she observed, with difficulty. She stopped a minute or so in the same place after he had gone, turning her rings absently on her thin fingers. She was thinking of some remarks which Dr. Clarke, the excellent and experienced local doctor, had made to her on the occasion of his last visit. With all the force of her strong will she had set herself to disbelieve them. But they had had subtle effects already. Finally she too went upstairs, bidding Marcella, whom she met coming down, hurry William with the tea, as Mr. Wharton might arrive any moment.

Marcella saw the room shut up — the large, shabby, beautiful room — the lamps brought in, fresh wood thrown on the fire to make it blaze, and the tea-table

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set out. Then she sat herself down on a low chair by the fire, leaning forward with her elbows on her knees and her hands clasped in front of her. Her black dress revealed her fine full throat and her white wrists, for she had an impatience of restraint anywhere, and wore frills and falls of black lace where other people would have followed the fashion in high collars and close wristbands. What must have struck any one with an observant eye, as she sat thus, thrown into beautiful light and shade by the blaze of the wood fire, was the massiveness of the head compared with the nervous delicacy of much of the face, the thinness of the wrist, and of the long and slender foot raised on the fender. It was perhaps the great thickness and full wave of the hair which gave the head its breadth; but the effect was singular, and would have been heavy but for the glow of the eyes, which balanced it.

She was thinking, as a *fiancée* should, of Aldous and their marriage, which had been fixed for the end of February. Yet not apparently with any rapturous absorption. There was a great deal to plan, and her mind was full of business. Who was to look after her various village schemes while she and Lady Winterbourne were away in London? Mary Harden had hardly brains enough, dear little thing as she was. They must find some capable woman and pay her. The Cravens would tell her, of course, that she was on the high road to the most degrading of *rôles* — the *rôle* of Lady Bountiful. But there were Lady Bountifuls and Lady Bountifuls. And the *rôle* itself was inevitable. It all depended upon how it was managed — in the interest of what ideas.

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She must somehow renew her relations with the Cravens in town. It would certainly be in her power now to help them and their projects forward a little. Of course they would distrust her, but that she would get over.

All the time she was listening mechanically for the hall door bell, which, however, across the distances of the great rambling house it was not easy to hear. Their coming guest was not much in her mind. She tacitly assumed that her father would look after him. On the two or three occasions when they had met during the last three months, including his luncheon at Mellor on the day after her engagement, her thoughts had been too full to allow her to take much notice of him — picturesque and amusing as he seemed to be. Of late he had not been much in the neighbourhood. There had been a slack time for both candidates, which was now to give way to a fresh period of hard canvassing in view of the election which everybody expected at the end of February.

But Aldous was to bring Edward Hallin! That interested her. She felt an intense curiosity to see and know Hallin, coupled with a certain nervousness. The impression she might be able to make on him would be in some sense an earnest of her future.

Suddenly, something undefinable — a slight sound, a current of air — made her turn her head. To her amazement she saw a young man in the doorway looking at her with smiling eyes, and quietly drawing off his gloves.

She sprang up with a feeling of annoyance.

"Mr. Wharton!"

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"Oh!—must you?"—he said, with a movement of one hand, as though to stop her. "Couldn't you stay like that? At first I thought there was nobody in the room. Your servant is grappling with my bags, which are as the sand of the sea for multitude, so I wandered in by myself. Then I saw you—and the fire—and the room. It was like a bit of music. It was mere wanton waste to interrupt it."

Marcella flushed, as she very stiffly shook hands with him.

"I did not hear the front door," she said coldly. "My mother will be here directly. May I give you some tea?"

"Thanks. No, I knew you did not hear me. That delighted me. It showed what charming things there are in the world that have no spectators! What a *delicious* place this is!—what a heavenly old place—especially in these half lights! There was a raw sun when I was here before, but now—"

He stood in front of the fire, looking round the great room, and at the few small lamps making their scanty light amid the flame-lit darkness. His hands were loosely crossed behind his back, and his boyish face, in its setting of curls, shone with content and self-possession.

"Well," said Marcella, bluntly, "I should prefer a little more light to live by. Perhaps, when you have fallen downstairs here in the dark as often as I have, you may too."

He laughed.

"But how much better, after all—don't you think so?—to have too little of anything than too much!"

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He flung himself into a chair beside the tea-table, looking up with gay interrogation as Marcella handed him his cup. She was a good deal surprised by him. On the few occasions of their previous meetings, these bright eyes, and this pronounced manner, had been — at any rate as towards herself — much less free and evident. She began to recover the start he had given her, and to study him with a half-unwilling curiosity.

"Then Mellor will please you," she said drily, in answer to his remark, carrying her own tea meanwhile to a chair on the other side of the fire. "My father never bought anything — my father can't. I believe we have chairs enough to sit down upon — but we have no curtains to half the windows. Can I give you anything?"

For he had risen, and was looking over the tea-tray.

"Oh! but I *must*," he said discontentedly. "I *must* have enough sugar in my tea!"

"I gave you more than the average," she said, with a sudden little leap of laughter, as she came to his aid. "Do all your principles break down like this? I was going to suggest that you might like some of that fire taken away?" And she pointed to the pile of blazing logs which now filled up the great chimney.

"That fire!" he said, shivering, and moving up to it. "Have you any idea what sort of a wind you keep up here on these hills on a night like this? And to think that in this weather, with a barometer that laughs in your face when you try to move it, I have three meetings to-morrow night!"

"When one loves the 'People,' with a large P," said Marcella, "one mustn't mind winds."

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He flashed a smile at her, answering to the sparkle of her look, then applied himself to his tea and toasted bun again, with the dainty deliberation of one enjoying every sip and bite.

"No; but if only the People didn't live so far apart. Some murderous person wanted them to have only one neck. I want them to have only one ear. Only then unfortunately everybody would speak well — which would bring things round to dulness again. Does Mr. Raeburn make you think very bad things of me, Miss Boyce?"

He bent forward to her as he spoke, his blue eyes all candour and mirth.

Marcella started.

"How can he?" she said abruptly. "I am not a Conservative."

"Not a Conservative?" he said joyously. "Oh! but impossible! Does that mean that you ever read my poor little speeches?"

He pointed to the local newspaper, freshly cut, which lay on a table at Marcella's elbow.

"Sometimes —" said Marcella, embarrassed. "There is so little time."

In truth she had hardly given his candidature a thought since the day Aldous proposed to her. She had been far too much taken up with her own prospects, with Lady Winterbourne's friendship, and her village schemes.

He laughed.

"Of course there is. When is the great event to be?"

"I didn't mean that," said Marcella, stiffly. "Lady Winterbourne and I have been trying to start some

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village workshops. We have been working and talking, and writing, morning, noon, and night."

"Oh! I know — yes, I heard of it. And you really think anything is going to come out of finicking little schemes of that sort?"

His dry change of tone drew a quick look from her. The fresh-coloured face was transformed. In place of easy mirth and mischief, she read an acute and half contemptuous attention.

"I don't know what you mean," she said slowly, after a pause. "Or rather — I do know quite well. You told papa — didn't you? — and Mr. Raeburn says that you are a Socialist — not half-and-half, as all the world is, but the real thing? And of course you want great changes: you don't like anything that might strengthen the upper class with the people. But that is nonsense. You can't get the changes for a long *long* time. And, meanwhile, people must be clothed and fed and kept alive."

She lay back in her high-backed chair and looked at him defiantly. His lip twitched, but he kept his gravity.

"You would be much better employed in forming a branch of the Agricultural Union," he said decidedly. "What is the good of playing Lady Bountiful to a decayed industry? All that is childish; we want *the means of revolution.* The people who are for reform shouldn't waste money and time on fads."

"I understand all that," she said scornfully, her quick breath rising and falling. "Perhaps you don't know that I was a member of the Venturist Society in London? What you say doesn't sound very new to me!"

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His seriousness disappeared in laughter. He hastily put down his cup and, stepping over to her, held out his hand.

"You a Venturist? So am I. Joy! Won't you shake hands with me, as comrades should? We are a very mixed set of people, you know, and between ourselves I don't know that we are coming to much. But we can make an alderman dream of the guillotine — that is always something. Oh! but now we can talk on quite a new footing!"

She had given him her hand for an instant, withdrawing it with shy rapidity, and he had thrown himself into a chair again, with his arms behind his head, and the air of one reflecting happily on a changed situation. "Quite a new footing," he repeated thoughtfully. "But it is — a little surprising. What does — what does Mr. Raeburn say to it?"

"Nothing! He cares just as much about the poor as you or I, please understand! He doesn't choose my way — but he won't interfere with it."

"Ah! that is like him — like Aldous."

Marcella started.

"You don't mind my calling him by his Christian name sometimes? It drops out. We used to meet as boys together at the Levens. The Levens are my cousins. He was a big boy, and I was a little one. But he didn't like me. You see — I was a little beast!"

His air of appealing candour could not have been more engaging.

"Yes, I fear I was a little beast. And he was, even then, and always, 'the good and beautiful.' You

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don't understand Greek, do you, Miss Boyce? But he was very good to me. I got into an awful scrape once. I let out a pair of eagle owls that used to be kept in the courtyard — Sir Charles loved them a great deal more than his babies — I let them out at night for pure wickedness, and they came to fearful ends in the park. I was to have been sent home next day, in the most unnecessary and penal hurry. But Aldous interposed — said he would look after me for the rest of the holidays."

"And then you tormented him?"

"Oh no!" he said with gentle complacency. "Oh no! I never torment anybody. But one must enjoy oneself you know; what else can one do? Then afterwards, when we were older — somehow I don't know — but we didn't get on. It is very sad — I wish he thought better of me."

The last words were said with a certain change of tone, and sitting up he laid the tips of his fingers together on his knees with a little plaintive air. Marcella's eyes danced with amusement, but she looked away from him to the fire, and would not answer.

"You don't help me out. You don't console me. It's unkind of you. Don't you think it a melancholy fate to be always admiring the people who detest you?"

"Don't admire them!" she said merrily.

His eyebrows lifted. "*That*," he said drily, "is disloyal. I call — I call your ancestor over the mantelpiece" — he waved his hand towards a blackened portrait in front of him — "to witness, that I am all for admiring Mr. Raeburn, and you discourage it. Well, but now — *now*" — he drew his chair eagerly

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towards hers, the pose of a minute before thrown to the winds — "do let us understand each other a little more before people come. You know I have a labour newspaper?"

She nodded.

"You read it?"

"Is it the *Labour Clarion?* I take it in."

"Capital!" he cried. "Then I know now why I found a copy in the village here. You lent it to a man called Hurd?"

"I did."

"Whose wife worships you? — whose good angel you have been? Do I know something about you, or do I not? Well, now, are you satisfied with that paper? Can you suggest to me means of improving it? It wants some fresh blood, I think — I must find it? I bought the thing last year, in a moribund condition, with the old staff. Oh! we will certainly take counsel together about it — most certainly! But first — I have been boasting of knowing something about you — but I should like to ask — do you know anything about me?"

Both laughed. Then Marcella tried to be serious.

"Well — I — I believe — you have some land?"

"Right!" he nodded — "I am a Lincolnshire landowner. I have about five thousand acres — enough to be tolerably poor on — and enough to play tricks with. I have a co-operative farm, for instance. At present I have lent them a goodish sum of money — and remitted them their first half-year's rent. Not so far a paying speculation. But it will do — some day. Meanwhile the estate wants money — and my plans and I want

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money — badly. I propose to make the *Labour Clarion* pay — if I can. That will give me more time for speaking and organising, for what concerns *us* — as Venturists — than the Bar."

"The Bar?" she said, a little mystified, but following every word with a fascinated attention.

"I made myself a barrister three years ago, to please my mother. She thought I should do better in Parliament — if ever I got in. Did you ever hear of my mother?"

There was no escaping these frank, smiling questions.

"No," said Marcella, honestly.

"Well, ask Lord Maxwell," he said, laughing. "He and she came across each other once or twice, when he was Home Secretary years ago, and she was wild about some woman's grievance or other. She always maintains that she got the better of him — no doubt he was left with a different impression. Well — my mother — most people thought her mad — perhaps she was — but then somehow — I loved her!"

He was still smiling, but at the last words a charming vibration crept into the words, and his eyes sought her with a young open demand for sympathy.

"Is that so rare?" she asked him, half laughing — instinctively defending her own feeling lest it should be snatched from her by any make-believe.

"Yes — as we loved each other — it is rare. My father died when I was ten. She would not send me to school, and I was always in her pocket — I shared all her interests. She was a wild woman — but she *lived*, as not one person in twenty lives."

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Then he sighed. Marcella was too shy to imitate his readiness to ask questions. But she supposed that his mother must be dead — indeed, now vaguely remembered to have heard as much.

There was a little silence.

"Please tell me," she said suddenly, "why do you attack my straw-plaiting? Is a co-operative farm any less of a stopgap?"

Instantly his face changed. He drew up his chair again beside her, as gay and keen-eyed as before.

"I can't argue it out now. There is so much to say. But do listen! I have a meeting in the village here next week to preach land nationalisation. We mean to try and form a branch of the Labourers' Union. Will you come?"

Marcella hesitated.

"I think so," she said slowly.

There was a pause. Then she raised her eyes and found his fixed upon her. A sudden sympathy — of youth, excitement, pleasure — seemed to rise between them. She had a quick impression of lightness, grace; of an open brow set in curls; of a look more intimate, inquisitive, commanding, than any she had yet met.

"May I speak to you, miss?" said a voice at the door.

Marcella rose hastily. Her mother's maid was standing there.

She hurried across the room.

"What is the matter, Deacon?"

"Your mother says, miss," said the maid, retreating into the hall, "I am to tell you she can't come down.

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Your father is ill, and she has sent for Dr. Clarke. But you are please not to go up. Will you give the gentlemen their tea, and she will come down before they go, if she can."

Marcella had turned pale.

"Mayn't I go, Deacon? What is it?"

"It's a bad fit of pain, your mother says, miss. Nothing can be done till the doctor comes. She begged *particular* that you wouldn't go up, miss. She doesn't want any one put out."

At the same moment there was a ring at the outer door.

"Oh, there is Aldous," cried Marcella, with relief, and she ran out into the hall to meet him.

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CHAPTER III.

Aldous advanced into the inner hall at sight of Marcella, leaving his companions behind in the vestibule taking off their coats. Marcella ran to him.

"Papa is ill!" she said to him hastily. "Mamma has sent for Dr. Clarke. She won't let me go up, and wants us to take no notice and have tea without her."

"I am so sorry! Can we do anything? The dog-cart is here with a fast horse. If your messenger went on foot — "

"Oh, no! they are sure to have sent the boy on the pony. I don't know why, but I have had a presentiment for a long time past that papa was going to be ill."

She looked white and excited. She had turned back to the drawing-room, forgetting the other guests, he walking beside her. As they passed along the dim hall, Aldous had her hand close in his, and when they passed under an archway at the further end he stooped suddenly in the shadows and kissed the hand. Touch — kiss — had the clinging, the intensity of passion. They were the expression of all that had lain vibrating at the man's inmost heart during the dark drive, while he had been chatting with his two companions.

"My darling! I hope not. Would you rather not see strangers? Shall I send Hallin and young Leven away? They would understand at once."

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"Oh, no! Mr. Wharton is here anyway — staying. Where is Mr. Hallin? I had forgotten him."

Aldous turned and called. Mr. Hallin and young Frank Leven, divining something unusual, were looking at the pictures in the hall.

Edward Hallin came up and took Marcella's offered hand. Each looked at the other with a special attention and interest. "She holds my friend's life in her hands — is she worthy of it?" was naturally the question hanging suspended in the man's judgment. The girl's manner was proud and shy, the manner of one anxious to please, yet already, perhaps, on the defensive.

Aldous explained the position of affairs, and Hallin expressed his sympathy. He had a singularly attractive voice, the voice indeed of the orator, which can adapt itself with equal charm and strength to the most various needs and to any pitch. As he spoke, Marcella was conscious of a sudden impression that she already knew him and could be herself with him at once.

"Oh, I say," broke in young Leven, who was standing behind; "don't you be bothered with us, Miss Boyce. Just send us back at once. I'm awfully sorry!"

"No; you are to come in!" she said, smiling through her pallor, which was beginning to pass away, and putting out her hand to him — the young Eton and Oxford athlete, just home for his Christmas vacation, was a great favourite with her — "You must come and have tea and cheer me up by telling me all the things you have killed this week. Is there anything left

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alive? You had come down to the fieldfares, you know, last Tuesday."

He followed her, laughing and protesting, and she led the way to the drawing-room. But as her fingers were on the handle she once more caught sight of the maid, Deacon, standing on the stairs, and ran to speak to her.

"He is better," she said, coming back with a face of glad relief. "The attack seems to be passing off. Mamma can't come down, but she begs that we will all enjoy ourselves."

"We'll endeavour," said young Leven, rubbing his hands, "by the help of tea. Miss Boyce, will you please tell Aldous and Mr. Hallin not to talk politics when they're taking me out to a party. They should fight a man of their own size. I'm all limp and trampled on, and want you to protect me."

The group moved, laughing and talking, into the drawing-room.

"Jiminy!" said Leven, stopping short behind Aldous, who was alone conscious of the lad's indignant astonishment; "what the deuce is *he* doing here?"

For there on the rug, with his back to the fire, stood Wharton, surveying the party with his usual smiling *aplomb*.

"Mr. Hallin, do you know Mr. Wharton?" said Marcella.

"Mr. Wharton and I have met several times on public platforms," said Hallin, holding out his hand, which Wharton took with effusion. Aldous greeted him with the impassive manner, the "three finger"

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manner, which was with him an inheritance — though not from his grandfather — and did not contribute to his popularity in the neighbourhood. As for young Leven, he barely nodded to the Radical candidate, and threw himself into a chair as far from the fire as possible.

"Frank and I have met before to-day!" said Wharton, laughing.

"Yes, I've been trying to undo some of your mischief," said the boy, bluntly. "I found him, Miss Boyce, haranguing a lot of men at the dinner-hour at Tudley End — one of our villages, you know — cramming them like anything — all about the game laws, and our misdeeds — my father's, of course."

Wharton raised a protesting hand.

"Oh — all very well! Of course it was us you meant! Well, when he'd driven off, I got up on a cart and had *my* say. I asked them whether they didn't all come out at our big shoots, and whether they didn't have almost as much fun as we did — why! the schoolmaster and the postman come to ask to carry cartridges, and everybody turns out, down to the cripples! — whether they didn't have rabbits given them all the year round; whether half of them hadn't brothers and sons employed somehow about the game, well-paid, and well-treated; whether any man-jack of them would be a ha'porth better off if there were no game; whether many of them wouldn't be worse off; and whether England wouldn't be a beastly dull place to live in, if people like him" — he pointed to Wharton — "had the governing of it! And I brought 'em all round too. I got them cheering and laughing.

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Oh! I can tell you old Dodgson 'll have to take me on. He says he'll ask me to speak for him at several places. I'm not half bad, I declare I'm not."

"I thought they gave you a holiday task at Eton," observed Wharton, blandly.

The lad coloured hotly, then bethought himself — radiant: —

"I left Eton last half, as of course you know quite well. But if it had only been last Christmas instead of this, wouldn't I have scored — by Jove! They gave us a beastly *essay* instead of a book. '*Demagogues!*' I sat up all night, and screwed out a page and a half. I'd have known something about it *now*."

And as he stood beside the tea-table, waiting for Marcella to entrust some tea to him for distribution, he turned and made a profound bow to his candidate cousin.

Everybody joined in the laugh, led by Wharton. Then there was a general drawing up of chairs, and Marcella applied herself to making tea, helped by Aldous. Wharton alone remained standing before the fire, observant and apart.

Hallin, whose health at this moment made all exertion, even a drive, something of a burden, sat a little away from the tea-table, resting, and glad to be silent. Yet all the time he was observing the girl presiding and the man beside her — his friend, her lover. The moment had a peculiar, perhaps a melancholy interest for him. So close had been the bond between himself and Aldous, that the lover's communication of his engagement had evoked in the

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friend that sense — poignant, inevitable — which in the realm of the affections always waits on something done and finished, — a leaf turned, a chapter closed. "That sad word, Joy!" Hallin was alone and ill when Raeburn's letter reached him, and through the following day and night he was haunted by Landor's phrase, long familiar and significant to him. His letter to his friend, and the letter to Miss Boyce for which Raeburn had asked him, had cost him an invalid's contribution of sleep and ease. The girl's answer had seemed to him constrained and young, though touched here and there with a certain fineness and largeness of phrase, which, if it was to be taken as an index of character, no doubt threw light upon the matter so far as Aldous was concerned.

Her beauty, of which he had heard much, now that he was face to face with it, was certainly striking enough — all the more because of its immaturity, the subtlety and uncertainty of its promise. *Immaturity — uncertainty* — these words returned upon him as he observed her manner with its occasional awkwardness, the awkwardness which goes with power not yet fully explored or mastered by its possessor. How Aldous hung upon her, following every movement, anticipating every want! After a while Hallin found himself half-inclined to Mr. Boyce's view, that men of Raeburn's type are never seen to advantage in this stage — this queer topsy-turvy stage — of first passion. He felt a certain impatience, a certain jealousy for his friend's dignity. It seemed to him too, every now and then, that she — the girl — was teased by all this absorption, this deference. He was conscious of

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watching for something in her that did not appear; and a first prescience of things anxious or untoward stirred in his quick sense.

"You may all say what you like," said Marcella, suddenly, putting down her cup, and letting her hand drop for emphasis on her knee; "but you will never persuade me that game-preserving doesn't make life in the country much more difficult, and the difference between classes much wider and bitterer, than they need be."

The remark cut across some rattling talk of Frank Leven's, who was in the first flush of the sportsman's ardour, and, though by no means without parts, could at the present moment apply his mind to little else than killing of one kind or another, unless it were to the chances of keeping his odious cousin out of Parliament.

Leven stared. Miss Boyce's speech seemed to him to have no sort of *à propos*. Aldous looked down upon her as he stood beside her, smiling.

"I wish you didn't trouble yourself so much about it," he said.

"How can I help it?" she answered quickly; and then flushed, like one who has drawn attention indiscreetly to their own personal situation.

"Trouble herself!" echoed young Leven. "Now, look here Miss Boyce, will you come for a walk with me? I'll convince you, as I convinced those fellows over there. I know I could, and you won't give me the chance; it's too bad."

"Oh, you!" she said, with a little shrug; "what do you know about it? One might as well consult a

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gambler about gambling when he is in the middle of his first rush of luck. I have ten times more right to an opinion than you have. I can keep my head cool, and notice a hundred things that *you* would never see. I come fresh into your country life, and the first thing that strikes me is that the whole machinery of law and order seems to exist for nothing in the world but to protect your pheasants! There are policemen — to catch poachers; there are magistrates — to try them. To judge from the newspapers, at least, they have nothing else to do. And if *you* follow your sporting instincts, you are a very fine fellow, and everybody admires you. But if a shoemaker's son in Mellor follows his, he is a villain and a thief, and the policeman and the magistrate make for him at once."

"But I don't steal his chickens!" cried the lad, choking with arguments and exasperation; "and why should he steal my pheasants? I paid for the eggs, I paid for the hens to sit on 'em, I paid for the coops to rear them in, I paid the men to watch them, I paid for the barley to feed them with: why is he to be allowed to take my property, and I am to be sent to jail if I take his?"

"*Property!*" said Marcella, scornfully. "You can't settle everything nowadays by that big word. We are coming to put the public good before property. If the nation should decide to curtail your 'right,' as you call it, in the general interest, it will do it, and you will be left to scream."

She had flung her arm round the back of her chair, and all her lithe young frame was tense with an eagerness, nay, an excitement, which drew Hallin's

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attention. It was more than was warranted by the conversation, he thought.

"Well, if you think the abolition of game preserving would be popular in the country, Miss Boyce, I'm certain you make a precious mistake," cried Leven. "Why, even you don't think it would be, do you, Mr. Hallin?" he said, appealing at random in his disgust.

"I don't know," said Hallin, with his quiet smile. "I rather think, on the whole, it would be. The farmers put up with it, but a great many of them don't like it. Things are mended since the Ground Game Act, but there are a good many grievances still left."

"I should think there are!" said Marcella, eagerly, bending forward to him. "I was talking to one of our farmers the other day whose land goes up to the edge of Lord Winterbourne's woods. '*They* don't keep their pheasants, miss,' he said. '*I* do. I and my corn. If I didn't send a man up half-past five in the morning, when the ears begin to fill, there'd be nothing left for *us*.' 'Why don't you complain to the agent?' I said. 'Complain! Lor' bless you, miss, you may complain till you're black in the face. I've allus found — an' I've been here, man and boy, thirty-two year — as how *Winterbournes generally best it*.' There you have the whole thing in a nutshell. It's a tyranny — a tyranny of the rich."

Flushed and sarcastic, she looked at Frank Leven; but Hallin had an uncomfortable feeling that the sarcasm was not all meant for him. Aldous was sitting with his hands on his knees, and his head bent forward a little. Once, as the talk ran on, Hallin saw

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him raise his grey eyes to the girl beside him, who certainly did not notice it, and was not thinking of him. There was a curious pain and perplexity in the expression, but something else too — a hunger, a dependence, a yearning, that for an instant gripped the friend's heart.

"Well, I know Aldous doesn't agree with you, Miss Boyce," cried Leven, looking about him in his indignation for some argument that should be final. "You don't, do you, Aldous? You don't think the country would be the better, if we could do away with game to-morrow?"

"No more than I think it would be the better," said Aldous, quietly, "if we could do away with gold plate and false hair to-morrow. There would be too many hungry goldsmiths and wig-makers on the streets."

Marcella turned to him, half defiant, half softened.

"Of course, your point lies in *to-morrow*," she said. "I accept that. We can't carry reform by starving innocent people. But the question is, what are we to work towards? Mayn't we regard the game laws as one of the obvious crying abuses to be attacked first — in the great campaign! — the campaign which is to bring liberty and self-respect back to the country districts, and make the labourer feel himself as much of a man as the squire?"

"What a head! What an attitude!" thought Hallin, half repelled, half fascinated. "But a girl that can talk politics — hostile politics — to her lover, and mean them too — or am I inexperienced? — and is it merely that she is so much interested in him that she wants to be quarrelling with him?"

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Aldous looked up. "I am not *sure*," he said, answering her. "That is always my difficulty, you know," and he smiled at her. "Game preserving is not to me personally an attractive form of private property, but it seems to me bound up with other forms, and I want to see where the attack is going to lead me. But I would protect your farmer — mind! — as zealously as you."

Hallin caught the impatient quiver of the girl's lip. The tea had just been taken away, and Marcella had gone to sit upon an old sofa near the fire, whither Aldous had followed her. Wharton, who had so far said nothing, had left his post of observation on the hearth-rug, and was sitting under the lamp balancing a paper-knife with great attention on two fingers. In the half light Hallin by chance saw a movement of Raeburn's hand towards Marcella's, which lay hidden among the folds of her dress — quick resistance on her part, then acquiescence. He felt a sudden pleasure in his friend's small triumph.

"Aldous and I have worn these things threadbare many a time," he said, addressing his hostess. "You don't know how kind he is to my dreams. I am no sportsman and have no landowning relations, so he ought to bid me hold my tongue. But he lets me rave. To me the simple fact is that *game preserving creates crime*. Agricultural life is naturally simpler — might be, it always seems to me, so much more easily moralised and fraternised than the industrial form. And you split it up and poison it all by the emphasis laid on this class pleasure. It is a natural pleasure, you say. Perhaps it is — the survival, perhaps, of

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some primitive instinct in our northern blood — but, if so, why should it be impossible for the rich to share it with the poor? I have little plans — dreams. I throw them out sometimes to catch Aldous, but he hardly rises to them!"

"Oh! I *say*," broke in Frank Leven, who could really bear it no longer. "Now look here, Miss Boyce, — what do you think Mr. Hallin wants? It is just sheer lunacy — it really is — though I know I'm impertinent, and he's a great man. But I do declare he wants Aldous to give up a big common there is — oh! over beyond Girtstone, down in the plain — on Lord Maxwell's estate, and make a *labourers'* shoot of it! Now, I ask you! And he vows he doesn't see why they shouldn't rear pheasants if they choose to club and pay for it. Well, I will say that much for him, Aldous didn't see his way to *that*, though he isn't the kind of Conservative *I* want to see in Parliament by a long way. Besides, it's such stuff! They say sport brutalises *us*, and then they want to go and contaminate the labourer. But we won't take the responsibility. We've got our own vices, and we'll stick to them; we're used to them; but we won't hand them on: we'd scorn the action."

The flushed young barbarian, driven to bay, was not to be resisted. Marcella laughed heartily, and Hallin laid an affectionate hand on the boy's shoulder, patting him as though he were a restive horse.

"Yes, I remember I was puzzled as to the details of Hallin's scheme," said Aldous, his mouth twitching. "I wanted to know who was to pay for the licences; how game enough for the number of applicants was

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to be got without preserving; and how men earning twelve or fourteen shillings a week were to pay a keeper. Then I asked a clergyman who has a living near this common what he thought would be the end of it. 'Well,' he said, 'the first day they'd shoot every animal on the place; the second day they'd shoot each other. Universal carnage — I should say that would be about the end of it.' These were trifles, of course — details."

Hallin shook his head serenely.

"I still maintain," he said, "that a little practical ingenuity might have found a way."

"And I will support you," said Wharton, laying down the paper-knife and bending over to Hallin, "with good reason. For three years and a few months just such an idea as you describe has been carried out on my own estate, and it has not worked badly at all."

"There!" cried Marcella. "There! I knew something could be done, if there was a will. I have always felt it."

She half turned to Aldous, then bent forward instead as though listening eagerly for what more Wharton might say, her face all alive, and eloquent.

"Of course, there was nothing to shoot!" exclaimed Frank Leven.

"On the contrary," said Wharton, smiling, "we are in the middle of a famous partridge country."

"How your neighbours must dote on you!" cried the boy. But Wharton took no notice.

"And my father preserved strictly," he went on. "It is quite a simple story. When I inherited, three

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years ago, I thought the whole thing detestable, and determined I wouldn't be responsible for keeping it up. So I called the estate together — farmers and labourers — and we worked out a plan. There are keepers, but they are the estate servants, not mine. Everybody has his turn according to the rules — I and my friends along with the rest. Not everybody can shoot every year, but everybody gets his chance, and, moreover, a certain percentage of all the game killed is public property, and is distributed every year according to a regular order."

"Who pays the keepers?" interrupted Leven.

"I do," said Wharton, smiling again. "Mayn't I — for the present — do what I will with mine own? I return in their wages some of my ill-gotten gains as a landowner. It is all makeshift, of course."

"I understand!" exclaimed Marcella, nodding to him — "you could not be a Venturist and keep up game-preserving?"

Wharton met her bright eye with a half deprecating, reserved air.

"You are right, of course," he said drily. "For a Socialist to be letting his keepers run in a man earning twelve shillings a week for knocking over a rabbit would have been a little strong. No one can be consistent in my position — in any landowner's position — it is impossible; still, thank Heaven, one can deal with the most glaring matters. As Mr. Raeburn said, however, all this game business is, of course, a mere incident of the general land and property system, as you will hear me expound when you come to that meeting you promised me to honour."

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He stooped forward, scanning her with smiling deference. Marcella felt the man's hand that held her own suddenly tighten an instant. Then Aldous released her, and rising walked towards the fire.

"You're *not* going to one of his meetings, Miss Boyce!" cried Frank, in angry incredulity.

Marcella hesitated an instant, half angry with Wharton. Then she reddened and threw back her dark head with the passionate gesture Hallin had already noticed as characteristic.

"Mayn't I go where I belong?" she said — "where my convictions lead me?"

There was a moment's awkward silence. Then Hallin got up.

"Miss Boyce, may we see the house? Aldous has told me much of it."

Presently, in the midst of their straggling progress through the half-furnished rooms of the garden front, preceded by the shy footman carrying a lamp, which served for little more than to make darkness visible, Marcella found herself left behind with Aldous. As soon as she felt that they were alone, she realised a jar between herself and him. His manner was much as usual, but there was an underlying effort and difficulty which her sensitiveness caught at once. A sudden wave of girlish trouble — remorse — swept over her. In her impulsiveness she moved close to him as they were passing through her mother's little sitting-room, and put her hand on his arm.

"I don't think I was nice just now," she said, stam-

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mering. "I didn't mean it. I seem to be always driven into opposition — into a feeling of war — when you are so good to me — so much too good to me!"

Aldous had turned at her first word. With a long breath, as it were of unspeakable relief, he caught her in his arms vehemently, passionately. So far she had been very shrinking and maidenly with him in their solitary moments, and he had been all delicate chivalry and respect, tasting to the full the exquisiteness of each fresh advance towards intimacy, towards lover's privilege, adoring her, perhaps, all the more for her reserve, her sudden flights, and stiffenings. But to-night he asked no leave, and in her astonishment she was almost passive.

"Oh, do let me go!" she cried at last, trying to disengage herself completely.

"No!" he said with emphasis, still holding her hand firmly. "Come and sit down here. They will look after themselves."

He put her, whether she would or no, into an arm-chair and knelt beside her.

"Did you think it was hardly kind," he said with a quiver of voice he could not repress, "to let me hear for the first time, in public, that you had promised to go to one of that man's meetings after refusing again and again to come to any of mine?"

"Do you want to forbid me to go?" she said quickly. There was a feeling in her which would have been almost relieved, for the moment, if he had said yes.

"By no means," he said steadily. "That was not our compact. But — guess for yourself what I want!

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Do you think" — he paused a moment — "do you think I put nothing of myself into my public life — into these meetings among the people who have known me from a boy? Do you think it is all a convention — that my feeling, my conscience, remain outside? You can't think that! But if not, how can I bear to live what is to be so large a part of my life out of your ken and sight? I know — I know — you warned me amply — you can't agree with me. But there is much besides intellectual agreement possible — much that would help and teach us both — if only we are together — not separated — not holding aloof — "

He stopped, watching all the changes of her face. She was gulfed in a deep wave of half-repentant feeling, remembering all his generosity, his forbearance, his devotion.

"When are you speaking next?" she half whispered. In the dim light her softened pose, the gentle sudden relaxation of every line, were an intoxication.

"Next week — Friday — at Gairsly. Hallin and Aunt Neta are coming."

"Will Miss Raeburn take me?"

His grey eyes shone upon her, and he kissed her hand.

"Mr. Hallin won't speak for you!" she said, after the silence, with a return of mischief.

"Don't be so sure! He has given me untold help in the drafting of my Bill. If I didn't call myself a Conservative, he would vote for me to-morrow. That's the absurdity of it. Do you know, I hear them coming back?"

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"One thing," she said hastily, drawing him towards her, and then holding him back, as though shrinking always from the feeling she could so readily evoke. "I must say it; you oughtn't to give me so much money, it is too much. Suppose I use it for things you don't like?"

"You won't," he said gaily.

She tried to push the subject further, but he would not have it.

"I am all for free discussion," he said in the same tone; "but sometimes debate must be stifled. I am going to stifle it!"

And stooping, he kissed her, lightly, tremulously. His manner showed her once more what she was to him — how sacred, how beloved. First it touched and shook her; then she sprang up with a sudden disagreeable sense of moral disadvantage — inferiority — coming she knew not whence, and undoing for the moment all that buoyant consciousness of playing the magnanimous, disinterested part which had possessed her throughout the talk in the drawing-room.

The others reappeared, headed by their lamp: Wharton first, scanning the two who had lingered behind, with his curious eyes, so blue and brilliant under the white forehead and the curls.

"We have been making the wildest shots at your ancestors, Miss Boyce," he said. "Frank professed to know everything about the pictures, and turned out to know nothing. I shall ask for some special coaching to-morrow morning. May I engage you — ten o'clock?"

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Marcella made some evasive answer, and they all sauntered back to the drawing-room.

"Shall you be at work to-morrow, Raeburn?" said Wharton.

"Probably," said Aldous drily. Marcella, struck by the tone, looked back, and caught an expression and bearing which were as yet new to her in the speaker. She supposed they represented the haughtiness natural in the man of birth and power towards the intruder, who is also the opponent.

Instantly the combative critical mood returned upon her, and the impulse to assert herself by protecting Wharton. His manner throughout the talk in the drawing-room had been, she declared to herself, excellent — modest, and self-restrained, comparing curiously with the boyish egotism and self-abandonment he had shown in their *tête-à-tête.*

"Why, there is Mr. Boyce," exclaimed Wharton, hurrying forward as they entered the drawing-room.

There, indeed, on the sofa was the master of the house, more ghastly black and white than ever, and prepared to claim to the utmost the tragic pre-eminence of illness. He shook hands coldly with Aldous, who asked after his health with the kindly brevity natural to the man who wants no effusions for himself in public or personal matters, and concludes therefore that other people desire none.

"You *are* better, papa?" said Marcella, taking his hand.

"Certainly, my dear — better for morphia. Don't talk of me. I have got my death warrant, but I hope

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I can take it quietly. Evelyn, I *specially* asked to have that thin cushion brought down from my dressing-room. It is strange that no one pays any attention to my wants."

Mrs. Boyce, almost as white, Marcella now saw, as her husband, moved forward from the fire, where she had been speaking to Hallin, took a cushion from a chair near, exactly similar to the one he missed, and changed his position a little.

"It is just the feather's weight of change that makes the difference, isn't it?" said Wharton, softly, sitting down beside the invalid.

Mr. Boyce turned a mollified countenance upon the speaker, and being now free from pain, gave himself up to the amusement of hearing his guest talk. Wharton devoted himself, employing all his best arts.

"Dr. Clarke is not anxious about him," Mrs. Boyce said in a low voice to Marcella as they moved away. "He does not think the attack will return for a long while, and he has given me the means of stopping it if it does come back."

"How tired you look!" said Aldous, coming up to them, and speaking in the same undertone. "Will you not let Marcella take you to rest?"

He was always deeply, unreasonably touched by any sign of stoicism, of defied suffering in women. Mrs. Boyce had proved it many times already. On the present occasion she put his sympathy by, but she lingered to talk with him. Hallin from a distance noticed first of all her tall thinness and fairness, and her wonderful dignity of carriage; then the cordiality of her manner to her future son-in-law. Marcella

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stood by listening, her young shoulders somewhat stiffly set. Her consciousness of her mother's respect and admiration for the man she was to marry was, oddly enough, never altogether pleasant to her. It brought with it a certain discomfort, a certain wish to argue things out.

Hallin and Aldous parted with Frank Leven at Mellor gate, and turned homeward together under a starry heaven already whitening to the coming moon.

"Do you know that man Wharton is getting an extraordinary hold upon the London working men?" said Hallin. "I have heard him tell that story of the game-preserving before. He was speaking for one of the Radical candidates at Hackney, and I happened to be there. It brought down the house. The *rôle* of your Socialist aristocrat, of your land-nationalising landlord, is a very telling one."

"And comparatively easy," said Aldous, "when you know that neither Socialism nor land-nationalisation will come in your time!"

"Oh! so you think him altogether a windbag?"

Aldous hesitated and laughed.

"I have certainly no reason to suspect him of principles. His conscience as a boy was of pretty elastic stuff."

"You may be unfair to him," said Hallin, quickly. Then, after a pause: "How long is he staying at Mellor?"

"About a week, I believe," said Aldous, shortly. "Mr. Boyce has taken a fancy to him."

They walked on in silence, and then Aldous turned to his friend in distress.

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"You know, Hallin, this wind is much too cold for you. You are the most wilful of men. Why would you walk?"

"Hold your tongue, sir, and listen to me. I think your Marcella is beautiful, and as interesting as she is beautiful. There!"

Aldous started, then turned a grateful face upon him.

"You must get to know her well," he said, but with some constraint.

"Of course. I wonder," said Hallin, musing, "whom she has got hold of among the Venturists. Shall you persuade her to come out of that, do you think, Aldous?"

"No!" said Raeburn, cheerfully. "Her sympathies and convictions go with them."

Then, as they passed through the village, he began to talk of quite other things — college friends, a recent volume of philosophical essays, and so on. Hallin, accustomed and jealously accustomed as he was to be the one person in the world with whom Raeburn talked freely, would not to-night have done or said anything to force a strong man's reserve. But his own mind was full of anxiety.

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CHAPTER IV.

"I *LOVE* this dilapidation!" said Wharton, pausing for a moment with his back against the door he had just shut. "Only it makes me long to take off my coat and practise some honest trade or other — plastering, or carpentering, or painting. What useless drones we upper classes are! Neither you nor I could mend that ceiling or patch this floor — to save our lives."

They were in the disused library. It was now the last room westwards of the garden front, but in reality it was part of the older house, and had been only adapted and re-built by that eighteenth-century Marcella whose money had been so gracefully and vainly lavished on giving dignity to her English husband's birthplace. The roof had been raised and domed to match the "Chinese room," at the expense of some small rooms on the upper floor; and the windows and doors had been suited to eighteenth-century taste. But the old books in the old latticed shelves which the Puritan founder of the family had bought in the days of the Long Parliament were still there; so were the chairs in which that worthy had sat to read a tract of Milton's or of Baxter's, or the table at which he had penned his letters to Hampden or Fairfax, or to his old friend — on the wrong side — Edmund Verney the

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standard-bearer. Only the worm-eaten shelves were dropping from their supports, and the books lay in mouldy confusion; the roofs had great holes and gaps, whence the laths hung dismally down, and bats came flitting in the dusk; and there were rotten places in the carpetless floor.

"I have tried my best," said Marcella, dolefully, stooping to look at a hole in the floor. "I got a bit of board and some nails, and tried to mend some of these places myself. But I only broke the rotten wood away; and papa was angry, and said I did more harm than good. I did get a carpenter to mend some of the chairs; but one doesn't know where to begin. I have cleaned and mended some of the books, but—"

She looked sadly round the musty, forlorn place.

"But not so well, I am afraid, as any second-hand bookseller's apprentice could have done it," said Wharton, shaking his head. "It's maddening to think what duffers we gentlefolks are!"

"Why do you harp on that?" said Marcella, quickly. She had been taking him over the house, and was in twenty minds again as to whether and how much she liked him.

"Because I have been reading some Board of Trade reports before breakfast," said Wharton, "on one or two of the Birmingham industries in particular. Goodness! what an amount of knowledge and skill and resource these fellows have that I go about calling the 'lower orders.' I wonder how long they are going to let me rule over them!"

"I suppose brain-power and education count for something still?" said Marcella, half scornfully.

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"I am greatly obliged to the world for thinking so," said Wharton with emphasis, "and for thinking so about the particular kind of brain-power I happen to possess, which is the point. The processes by which a Birmingham jeweller makes the wonderful things which we attribute to 'French taste' when we see them in the shops of the Rue de la Paix are, of course, mere imbecility — compared to my performances in Responsions. Lucky for *me*, at any rate, that the world has decided it so. I get a good time of it — and the Birmingham jeweller calls me 'sir.'"

"Oh! the skilled labour! that can take care of itself, and won't go on calling you 'sir' much longer. But what about the unskilled — the people here for instance — the villagers? We talk of their governing themselves; we wish it, and work for it. But which of us *really* believes that they are fit for it, or that they are ever going to get along without *our* brain-power?"

"No — poor souls!" said Wharton, with a peculiar vibrating emphasis. "'*By their stripes we are healed, by their death we have lived.*' Do you remember your Carlyle?"

They had entered one of the bays formed by the bookcases which on either side of the room projected from the wall at regular intervals, and were standing by one of the windows which looked out on the great avenue. Beside the window on either side hung a small portrait — in the one case of an elderly man in a wig, in the other of a young, dark-haired woman.

"Plenty in general, but nothing in particular," said Marcella, laughing. "Quote."

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He was leaning against the angle formed by the wall and the bookcase. The half-serious, half-provocative intensity of his blue eyes under the brow which drooped forward contrasted with the careless, well-appointed ease of his general attitude and dress.

"'*Two men I honour, and no third,*'" he said, quoting in a slightly dragging, vibrating voice: "'*First, the toilworn craftsman that with earth-made implement laboriously conquers the earth and makes her man's.—Hardly-entreated Brother! For us was thy back so bent, for us were thy straight limbs and fingers so deformed; thou wert our conscript, on whom the lot fell, and fighting* our *battles wert so marred.*' Heavens! how the words swing! But it is great nonsense, you know, for you and me — Venturists — to be maundering like this. Charity — benevolence — that is all Carlyle is leading up to. He merely wants the cash nexus supplemented by a few good offices. But we want something much more unpleasant! 'Keep your subscriptions — hand over your dividends — turn out of your land — and go to work!' Nowadays society is trying to get out of doing what *we* want, by doing what Carlyle wanted."

"*Do* you want it?" said Marcella.

"I don't know," he said, laughing. "It won't come in our time."

Her lip showed her scorn.

"That's what we all think. Meanwhile you will perhaps admit that a little charity greases the wheels."

"*You* must, because you are a woman; and women are made for charity — and aristocracy."

"Do you suppose you know so much about women?"

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she asked him, rather hotly. "I notice it is always the assumption of the people who make most mistakes."

"Oh! I know enough to steer by!" he said, smiling, with a little inclination of his curly head, as though to propitiate her. "How like you are to that portrait!"

Marcella started, and saw that he was pointing to the woman's portrait beside the window — looking from it to his hostess with a close considering eye.

"That was an ancestress of mine," she said coldly, "an Italian lady. She was rich and musical. Her money built these rooms along the garden, and these are her music books."

She showed him that the shelves against which she was leaning were full of old music.

"Italian!" he said, lifting his eyebrows. "Ah, that explains. Do you know — that you have all the qualities of a leader!" — and he moved away a yard from her, studying her — "mixed blood — one must always have that to fire and fuse the English paste — and then — but no! that won't do — I should offend you."

Her first instinct was one of annoyance — a wish to send him about his business, or rather to return him to her mother who would certainly keep him in order. Instead, however, she found herself saying, as she looked carelessly out of window —

"Oh! go on."

"Well, then" — he drew himself up suddenly and wheeled round upon her — "you have the gift of compromise. That is invaluable — that will take you far."

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"Thank you!" she said. "Thank you! I know what that means — from a Venturist. You think me a mean insincere person!"

He started, then recovered himself and came to lean against the bookshelves beside her.

"I mean nothing of the sort," he said, in quite a different manner, with a sort of gentle and personal emphasis. "But — may I explain myself, Miss Boyce, in a room with a fire? I can see you shivering under your fur."

For the frost still reigned supreme outside, and the white grass and trees threw chill reflected lights into the forsaken library. Marcella controlled a pulse of excitement that had begun to beat in her, admitted that it was certainly cold, and led the way through a side door to a little flagged parlour, belonging to the oldest portion of the house, where, however, a great log-fire was burning, and some chairs drawn up round it. She took one and let the fur wrap she had thrown about her for their promenade through the disused rooms drop from her shoulders. It lay about her in full brown folds, giving special dignity to her slim height and proud head. Wharton glancing about in his curious inquisitive way, now at the neglected pictures, now on the walls, now at the old oak chairs and chests, now at her, said to himself that she was a splendid and inspiring creature. She seemed to be on the verge of offence with him too, half the time, which was stimulating. She would have liked, he thought, to play the great lady with him already, as Aldous Raeburn's betrothed. But he had so far managed to keep her off that plane — and intended to go on doing so.

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"Well, I meant this," he said, leaning against the old stone chimney and looking down upon her; "only *don't* be offended with me, please. You are a Socialist, and you are going — some day — to be Lady Maxwell. Those combinations are only possible to women. They can sustain them, because they are imaginative — not logical."

She flushed.

"And you," she said, breathing quickly, "are a Socialist and a landlord. What is the difference?"

He laughed.

"Ah! but I have no gift — I can't ride the two horses, as you will be able to — quite honestly. There's the difference. And the consequence is that with my own class I am an outcast — they all hate me. But you will have power as Lady Maxwell — and power as a Socialist — because you will give and take. Half your time you will act as Lady Maxwell should, the other half like a Venturist. And, as I said, it will give you power — a modified power. But men are less clever at that kind of thing."

"Do you mean to say," she asked him abruptly, "that you have given up the luxuries and opportunities of your class?"

He shifted his position a little.

"That is a different matter," he said after a moment. "We Socialists are all agreed, I think, that no man can be a Socialist by himself. Luxuries, for the present, are something personal, individual. It is only a man's 'public form' that matters. And there, as I said before, I have no gift! — I have not a relation or an old friend in the world that has not turned

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his back upon me — as you might see for yourself yesterday! My class has renounced me already — which, after all, is a weakness."

"So you pity yourself?" she said.

"By no means! We all choose the part in life that amuses us — that brings us most *thrill*. I get most thrill out of throwing myself into the workmen's war — much more than I could ever get, you will admit, out of dancing attendance on my very respectable cousins. My mother taught me to see everything dramatically. We have no drama in England at the present moment worth a cent; so I amuse myself with this great tragi-comedy of the working-class movement. It stirs, pricks, interests me, from morning till night. I feel the great rough elemental passions in it, and it delights me to know that every day brings us nearer to some great outburst, to scenes and struggles at any rate that will make us all look alive. I am like a child with the best of its cake to come, but with plenty in hand already. Ah! — stay still a moment, Miss Boyce!"

To her amazement he stooped suddenly towards her; and she, looking down, saw that a corner of her light, black dress, which had been overhanging the low stone fender, was in flames, and that he was putting it out with his hands. She made a movement to rise, alarmed lest the flames should leap to her face — her hair. But he, releasing one hand for an instant from its task of twisting and rolling the skirt upon itself, held her heavily down.

"Don't move; I will have it out in a moment. You won't be burnt."

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And in a second more she was looking at a ragged brown hole in her dress; and at him, standing, smiling, before the fire, and wrapping a handkerchief round some of the fingers of his left hand.

"You have burnt yourself, Mr. Wharton?"

"A little."

"I will go and get something — what would you like?"

"A little olive oil if you have some, and a bit of lint — but don't trouble yourself."

She flew to find her mother's maid, calling and searching on her way for Mrs. Boyce herself, but in vain. Mrs. Boyce had disappeared after breakfast, and was probably helping her husband to dress.

In a minute or so Marcella ran downstairs again, bearing various medicaments. She sped to the Stone Parlour, her cheek and eye glowing.

"Let me do it for you."

"If you please," said Wharton, meekly.

She did her best, but she was not skilful with her fingers, and this close contact with him somehow excited her.

"There," she said, laughing and releasing him. "Of course, if I were a work-girl I should have done it better. They are not going to be very bad, I think."

"What, the burns? Oh, no! They will have recovered, I am afraid, long before your dress."

"Oh, my dress! yes, it is deplorable. I will go and change it."

She turned to go, but she lingered instead, and said with an odd, introductory laugh:

"I believe you saved my life!"

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"Well, I am glad I was here. You might have lost self-possession — even *you* might, you know! — and then it would have been serious."

"Anyway" — her voice was still uncertain — "I might have been disfigured — disfigured for life!"

"I don't know why you should dwell upon it now it's done with," he declared, smiling.

"It would be strange, wouldn't it, if I took it quite for granted — all in the day's work?" She held out her hand: "I am grateful — please."

He bowed over it, laughing, again with that eighteenth-century air which might have become a Chevalier des Grieux.

"May I exact a reward?"

"Ask it."

"Will you take me down with you to your village? I know you are going. I must walk on afterwards and catch a midday train to Widrington. I have an appointment there at two o'clock. But perhaps you will introduce me to one or two of your poor people first?"

Marcella assented, went upstairs, changed her dress, and put on her walking things, more than half inclined all the time to press her mother to go with them. She was a little unstrung and tremulous, pursued by a feeling that she was somehow letting herself go, behaving disloyally and indecorously towards whom? — towards Aldous? But how, or why? She did not know. But there was a curious sense of lost bloom, lost dignity, combined with an odd wish that Mr. Wharton were not going away for the day. In the end, however, she left her mother undisturbed.

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By the time they were half way to the village, Marcella's uncomfortable feelings had all passed away. Without knowing it, she was becoming too much absorbed in her companion to be self-critical, so long as they were together. It seemed to her, however, before they had gone more than a few hundred yards that he was taking advantage — presuming on what had happened. He offended her taste, her pride, her dignity, in a hundred ways, she discovered. At the same time it was *she* who was always on the defensive — protecting her dreams, her acts, her opinions, against the constant fire of his half-ironical questions, which seemed to leave her no time at all to carry the war into the enemy's country. He put her through a quick cross-examination about the village, its occupations, the incomes of the people, its local charities and institutions, what she hoped to do for it, what she would do if she could, what she thought it *possible* to do. She answered first reluctantly, then eagerly, her pride all alive to show that she was not merely ignorant and amateurish. But it was no good. In the end he made her feel as Antony Craven had constantly done — that she knew nothing exactly, that she had not mastered the conditions of any one of the social problems she was talking about; that not only was her reading of no account, but that she had not even managed to *see* these people, to interpret their lives under her very eyes, with any large degree of insight.

Especially was he merciless to all the Lady Bountiful pose, which meant so much to her imagination — not in words so much as in manner. He let her see

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that all the doling and shepherding and advising that still pleased her fancy looked to him the merest temporary palliative, and irretrievably tainted, even at that, with some vulgar feeling or other. All that the well-to-do could do for the poor under the present state of society was but a niggardly quit-rent; as for any relation of "superior" and "inferior" in the business, or of any social desert attaching to these precious efforts of the upper class to daub the gaps in the ruinous social edifice for which they were themselves responsible, he did not attempt to conceal his scorn. If you did not do these things, so much the worse for you when the working class came to its own; if you did do them, the burden of debt was hardly diminished, and the rope was still left on your neck.

Now Marcella herself had on one or two occasions taken a malicious pleasure in flaunting these doctrines, or some of them, under Miss Raeburn's eyes. But somehow, as applied to herself, they were disagreeable. Each of us is to himself a "special case"; and she saw the other side. Hence a constant soreness of feeling; a constant recalling of the argument to the personal point of view; and through it all a curious growth of intimacy, a rubbing away of barriers. She had felt herself of no account before, intellectually, in Aldous's company, as we know. But then how involuntary on his part, and how counterbalanced by that passionate idealism of his love, which glorified every pretty impulse in her to the noblest proportions! Under Wharton's Socratic method, she was conscious at times of the most wild and womanish desires, worthy of her childhood — to cry, to go into

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a passion! — and when they came to the village, and every human creature, old and young, dropped its obsequious curtsey as they passed, she could first have beaten them for so degrading her, and the next moment felt a feverish pleasure in thus parading her petty power before a man who in his doctrinaire pedantry had no sense of poetry, or of the dear old natural relations of country life.

They went first to Mrs. Jellison's, to whom Marcella wished to unfold her workshop scheme.

"Don't let me keep you," she said to Wharton coldly, as they neared the cottage; "I know you have to catch your train."

Wharton consulted his watch. He had to be at a local station some two miles off within an hour.

"Oh! I have time," he said. "Do take me in, Miss Boyce. I have made acquaintance with these people so far, as my constituents — now show them to me as your subjects. Besides, I am an observer. I 'collect' peasants. They are my study."

"They are not my subjects, but my friends," she said with the same stiffness.

They found Mrs. Jellison having her dinner. The lively old woman was sitting close against her bit of fire, on her left a small deal table which held her cold potatoes and cold bacon; on her right a tiny window and window-sill whereon lay her coil of "plait" and the simple straw-splitting machine she had just been working. When Marcella had taken the only other chair the hovel contained, nothing else remained for Wharton but to flatten himself as closely against the door as he might.

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"I'm sorry I can't bid yer take a cheer," said Mrs. Jellison to him, "but what yer han't got yer can't give, so I don't trouble my head about nothink."

Wharton applauded her with easy politeness, and then gave himself, with folded arms, to examining the cottage while Marcella talked. It might be ten feet broad, he thought, by six feet in one part and eight feet in another. The roof was within little more than an inch of his head. The stairway in the corner was falling to pieces; he wondered how the woman got up safely to her bed at night; custom, he supposed, can make even old bones agile.

Meanwhile Marcella was unfolding the project of the straw-plaiting workshop that she and Lady Winterbourne were about to start. Mrs. Jellison put on her spectacles apparently that she might hear the better, pushed away her dinner in spite of her visitors' civilities, and listened with a bright and beady eye.

"An' yer agoin' to pay me one a sixpence a score, where I now gets ninepence. And I'll not have to tramp it into town no more — you'll send a man round. And who is agoin' to pay me, miss, if you'll excuse me asking?"

"Lady Winterbourne and I," said Marcella, smiling. "We're going to employ this village and two others, and make as good business of it as we can. But we're going to begin by giving the workers better wages, and in time we hope to teach them the higher kinds of work."

"Lor'!" said Mrs. Jellison. "But I'm not one o' them as kin do with changes." She took up her plait

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and looked at it thoughtfully. "Eighteen-pence a score. It wor that rate when I wor a girl. An' it ha' been dibble — dibble — iver sense; a penny off here, an' a penny off there, an' a hard job to keep a bite ov anythink in your mouth."

"Then I may put down your name among our workers, Mrs. Jellison?" said Marcella, rising and smiling down upon her.

"Oh, lor', no; I niver said that," said Mrs. Jellison, hastily. "I don't hold wi' shilly-shallyin' wi' yer means o' livin'. I've took my plait to Jimmy Gedge — 'im an' 'is son, fust shop on yer right hand when yer git into town — twenty-five year, summer and winter — me an' three other women, as give me a penny a journey for takin' theirs. If I wor to go messin' about wi' Jimmy Gedge, Lor' bless yer, I should 'ear ov it — oh! I shoulden sleep o' nights for thinkin' o' how Jimmy ud serve me out when I wor least egspectin' ov it. He's a queer un. No, miss, thank yer kindly; but I think I'll bide."

Marcella, amazed, began to argue a little, to expound the many attractions of the new scheme. Greatly to her annoyance, Wharton came forward to her help, guaranteeing the solvency and permanence of her new partnership in glib and pleasant phrase, wherein her angry fancy suspected at once the note of irony. But Mrs. Jellison held firm, embroidering her negative, indeed, with her usual cheerful chatter, but sticking to it all the same. At last there was no way of saving dignity but to talk of something else and go — above all, to talk of something else before going, lest the would-be benefactor should be thought a petty tyrant.

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"Oh, Johnnie? — thank yer, miss — 'e's an owdacious young villain as iver I seed — but *clever* — lor', you'd need 'ave eyes in yer back to look after *'im*. An' *coaxin'!* ''Aven't yer brought me no sweeties, Gran'ma?' 'No, my dear,' says I. 'But if you was to *look*, Gran'ma — in both your pockets, Gran'ma — iv you was to let *me* look?' It's a sharp un Isabella, she don't 'old wi' sweet-stuff, she says, sich a pack o' nonsense. She'd stuff herself sick when she wor 'is age. Why shouldn't *ee* be happy, same as her? There ain't much to make a child 'appy in *that* 'ouse. Westall, ee's that mad about them poachers over Tudley End; ee's like a wild bull at 'ome. I told Isabella ee'd come to knockin' ov her about *some* day, though ee did speak so oily when ee wor a courtin'. Now she knows as I kin see a thing or two," said Mrs. Jellison, significantly. Her manner, Wharton noticed, kept always the same gay philosophy, whatever subject turned up.

"Why, that's an old story — that Tudley End business —" said Marcella, rising. "I should have thought Westall might have got over it by now."

"But bless yer, ee says it's goin' on as lively as iver. Ee says ee knows they're set on grabbin' the birds t'other side the estate, over beyond Mellor way — ee's got wind of it — an' ee's watchin' night an' day to see they don't do him no bad turn *this* month, bekase o' the big shoot they allus has in January. An' lor', ee do speak drefful bad o' *soom* folks," said Mrs. Jellison, with an amused expression. "You know some on 'em, miss, don't yer?" And the old woman, who had begun toying with her potatoes, slanted her fork

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over her shoulder so as to point towards the Hurds' cottage, whereof the snow-laden roof could be seen conspicuously through the little lattice beside her, making sly eyes the while at her visitor.

"I don't believe a word of it," said Marcella, impatiently. "Hurd has been in good work since October, and has no need to poach. Westall has a down on him. You may tell him I think so, if you like."

"That I will," said Mrs. Jellison, cheerfully, opening the door for them. "There's nobody makes 'im 'ear the trëuth, nobbut me. I *loves* naggin' ov 'im, ee's that masterful. But ee don't master *me!*"

"A gay old thing," said Wharton as they shut the gate behind them. "How she does enjoy the human spectacle. And obstinate too. But you will find the younger ones more amenable."

"Of course," said Marcella, with dignity. "I have a great many names already. The old people are always difficult. But Mrs. Jellison will come round."

"Are you going in here?"

"Please."

Wharton knocked at the Hurds' door, and Mrs. Hurd opened.

The cottage was thick with smoke. The chimney only drew when the door was left open. But the wind to-day was so bitter that mother and children preferred the smoke to the draught. Marcella soon made out the poor little bronchitic boy, sitting coughing by the fire, and Mrs. Hurd busied with some washing. She introduced Wharton, who, as before, stood for some time, hat in hand, studying the cottage. Marcella was perfectly conscious of it, and a blush rose to her cheek

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while she talked to Mrs. Hurd. For both this and Mrs. Jellison's hovel were her father's property and somewhat highly rented.

Minta Hurd said eagerly that she would join the new straw-plaiting, and went on to throw out a number of hurried, half-coherent remarks about the state of the trade past and present, leaning meanwhile against the table and endlessly drying her hands on the towel she had taken up when her visitors came in.

Her manner was often nervous and flighty in these days. She never looked happy; but Marcella put it down to health or natural querulousness of character. Yet both she and the children were clearly better nourished, except Willie, in whom the tubercular tendency was fast gaining on the child's strength.

Altogether Marcella was proud of her work, and her eager interest in this little knot of people whose lives she had shaped was more possessive than ever. Hurd, indeed, was often silent and secretive; but she put down her difficulties with him to our odious system of class differences, against which in her own way she was struggling. One thing delighted her — that he seemed to take more and more interest in the labour questions she discussed with him, and in that fervid, exuberant literature she provided him with. Moreover, he now went to all Mr. Wharton's meetings that were held within reasonable distance of Mellor; and, as she said to Aldous with a little laugh, which, however, was not unsweet, *he* had found her man work — *she* had robbed his candidate of a vote.

Wharton listened a while to her talk with Minta, smiled a little, unperceived of Marcella, at the young

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mother's docilities of manner and phrase; then turned his attention to the little hunched and coughing object by the fire.

"Are you very bad, little man?"

The white-faced child looked up, a dreary look, revealing a patient, melancholy soul. He tried to answer, but coughed instead.

Wharton, moving towards him, saw a bit of ragged white paper lying on the ground, which had been torn from a grocery parcel.

"Would you like something to amuse you a bit — Ugh! this smoke! Come round here, it won't catch us so much. Now, then, what do you say to a doggie, — two doggies?"

The child stared, let himself be lifted on the stranger's knee, and did his very utmost to stop coughing. But when he had succeeded his quick panting breaths still shook his tiny frame and Wharton's knee.

"Hm — Give him two months or thereabouts!" thought Wharton. "What a beastly hole! — one room up, and one down, like the other, only a shade larger. Damp, insanitary, cold — bad water, bad drainage, I'll be bound — bad everything. That girl may well try her little best. And I go making up to that man Boyce! What for? Old spites? — new spites? — which? — or both!"

Meanwhile his rapid skilful fingers were tearing, pinching, and shaping; and in a very few minutes there, upon his free knee, stood the most enticing doggie of pinched paper, a hound in full course, with long ears and stretching legs.

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The child gazed at it with ravishment, put out a weird hand, touched it, stroked it, and then, as he looked back at Wharton, the most exquisite smile dawned in his saucer-blue eyes.

"What? did you like it, grasshopper?" cried Wharton, enchanted by the beauty of the look, his own colour mounting. "Then you shall have another."

And he twisted and turned his piece of fresh paper, till there, beside the first, stood a second fairy animal —a greyhound this time, with arching neck and sharp long nose.

"There's two on 'em at Westall's!" cried the child, hoarsely, clutching at his treasures in an ecstasy.

Mrs. Hurd, at the other end of the cottage, started as she heard the name. Marcella noticed it; and with her eager sympathetic look began at once to talk of Hurd and the works at the Court. She understood they were doing grand things, and that the work would last all the winter. Minta answered hurriedly and with a curious choice of phrases. "Oh! he didn't have nothing to say against it." Mr. Brown, the steward, seemed satisfied. All that she said was somehow irrelevant; and, to Marcella's annoyance, plaintive as usual. Wharton, with the boy inside his arm, turned his head an instant to listen.

Marcella, having thought of repeating, without names, some of Mrs. Jellison's gossip, then shrank from it. He had promised her, she thought to herself with a proud delicacy; and she was not going to treat the word of a working man as different from anybody else's.

So she fastened her cloak again, which she had

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thrown open in the stifling air of the cottage, and turned both to call her companion and give a smile or two to the sick boy.

But, as she did so, she stood amazed at the spectacle of Wharton and the child. Then, moving up to them, she perceived the menagerie — for it had grown to one — on Wharton's knee.

"You didn't guess I had such tricks," he said, smiling.

"But they are so good — so artistic!" She took up a little galloping horse he had just fashioned and wondered at it.

"A great-aunt taught me — she was a genius — I follow her at a long distance. Will you let me go, young man? You may keep all of them."

But the child, with a sudden contraction of the brow, flung a tiny stick-like arm round his neck, pressing hard, and looking at him. There was a red spot in each wasted cheek, and his eyes were wide and happy. Wharton returned the look with one of quiet scrutiny — the scrutiny of the doctor or the philosopher. On Marcella's quick sense the contrast of the two heads impressed itself — the delicate youth of Wharton's with its clustering curls — the sunken contours and the helpless suffering of the other. Then Wharton kissed the little fellow, put his animals carefully on to a chair beside him, and set him down.

They walked along the snowy street again, in a different relation to each other. Marcella had been touched and charmed, and Wharton teased her no more. As they reached the door of the almshouse

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where the old Pattons lived, she said to him: "I think I had rather go in here by myself, please. I have some things to give them — old Patton has been very ill this last week — but I know what you think of doles — and I know too what you think, what you must think, of my father's cottages. It makes me feel a hypocrite; yet I must do these things; we are different, you and I — I am sure you will miss your train!"

But there was no antagonism, only painful feeling in her softened look.

Wharton put out his hand.

"Yes, it is time for me to go. You say I make you feel a hypocrite! I wonder whether you have any idea what you make me feel? Do you imagine I should dare to say the things I have said except to one of the *élite*? Would it be worth my while, as a social reformer? Are you not vowed to great destinies? When one comes across one of the tools of the future, must one not try to sharpen it, out of one's poor resources, in spite of manners?"

Marcella, stirred — abashed — fascinated — let him press her hand. Then he walked rapidly away towards the station, a faint smile twitching at his lip.

"An inexperienced girl," he said to himself, composedly.

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CHAPTER V.

Before she went home, Marcella turned into the little rectory garden to see if she could find Mary Harden for a minute or two. The intimacy between them was such that she generally found entrance to the house by going round to a garden door and knocking or calling. The house was very small, and Mary's little sitting-room was close to this door.

Her knock brought Mary instantly.

"Oh! come in. You won't mind. We were just at dinner. Charles is going away directly. Do stay and talk to me a bit."

Marcella hesitated, but at last went in. The meals at the rectory distressed her — the brother and sister showed the marks of them. To-day she found their usual fare carefully and prettily arranged on a spotless table; some bread, cheese, and boiled rice — nothing else. Nor did they allow themselves any fire for meals. Marcella, sitting beside them in her fur, did not feel the cold, but Mary was clearly shivering under her shawl. They eat meat twice a week, and in the afternoon Mary lit the sitting-room fire. In the morning she contented herself with the kitchen, where, as she cooked for many sick folk, and had only a girl of fourteen whom she was training to help her with the housework, she had generally much to do.

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The Rector did not stay long after her arrival. He had a distant visit to pay to a dying child, and hurried off so as to be home, if possible, before dark. Marcella admired him, but did not feel that she understood him more as they were better acquainted. He was slight and young, and not very clever; but a certain inexpugnable dignity surrounded him, which, real as it was, sometimes irritated Marcella. It sat oddly on his round face — boyish still, in spite of its pinched and anxious look — but there it was, not to be ignored. Marcella thought him a Conservative, and very backward and ignorant in his political and social opinions. But she was perfectly conscious that she must also think him a saint; and that the deepest things in him were probably not for her.

Mr. Harden said a few words to her now as to her straw-plaiting scheme, which had his warmest sympathy — Marcella contrasted his tone gratefully with that of Wharton, and once more fell happily in love with her own ideas — then he went off, leaving the two girls together.

"Have you seen Mrs. Hurd this morning?" said Mary.

"Yes, Willie seems very bad."

Mary assented.

"The doctor says he will hardly get through the winter, especially if this weather goes on. But the greatest excitement of the village just now — do you know? — is the quarrel between Hurd and Westall. Somebody told Charles yesterday that they never meet without threatening each other. Since the covers at Tudley End were raided, Westall seems to have quite

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lost his head. He declares Hurd knew all about that, and that he is hand and glove with the same gang still. He vows he will catch him out, and Hurd told the man who told Charles that if Westall bullies him any more he will put a knife into him. And Charles says that Hurd is not a bit like he was. He used to be such a patient, silent creature. Now —"

"He has woke up to a few more ideas and a little more life than he had, that's all," said Marcella, impatiently. "He poached last winter, and small blame to him. But since he got work at the Court in November — is it likely? He knows that he was suspected; and what could be his interest now, after a hard day's work, to go out again at night, and run the risk of falling into Westall's clutches, when he doesn't want either the food or the money?"

"I don't know," said Mary, shaking her head. "Charles says, if they once do it, they hardly ever leave it off altogether. It's the excitement and amusement of it."

"He promised me," said Marcella, proudly.

"They promise Charles all sorts of things," said Mary, slyly; "but they don't keep to them."

Warmly grateful as both she and the Rector had been from the beginning to Marcella for the passionate interest she took in the place and the people, the sister was sometimes now a trifle jealous — divinely jealous — for her brother. Marcella's unbounded confidence in her own power and right over Mellor, her growing tendency to ignore anybody else's right or power, sometimes set Mary aflame, for Charles's sake, heartily and humbly as she admired her beautiful friend.

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"I shall speak to Mr. Raeburn about it," said Marcella.

She never called him "Aldous" to anybody — a stiffness which jarred a little upon the gentle, sentimental Mary.

"I saw you pass," she said, "from one of the top windows. He was with you, wasn't he?"

A slight colour sprang to her sallow cheek, a light to her eyes. Most wonderful, most interesting was this engagement to Mary, who — strange to think! — had almost brought it about. Mr. Raeburn was to her one of the best and noblest of men, and she felt quite simply, and with a sort of Christian trembling for him, the romance of his great position. Was Marcella happy, was she proud of him, as she ought to be? Mary was often puzzled by her.

"Oh no!" said Marcella, with a little laugh. "That wasn't Mr. Raeburn. I don't know where your eyes were, Mary. That was Mr. Wharton, who is staying with us. He has gone on to a meeting at Widrington."

Mary's face fell.

"Charles says Mr. Wharton's influence in the village is very bad," she said quickly. "He makes everybody discontented; sets everybody by the ears; and, after all, what can he do for anybody?"

"But that's just what he wants to do — to make them discontented," cried Marcella. "Then, if they vote for him, that's the first practical step towards improving their life."

"But it won't give them more wages or keep them out of the public house," said Mary, bewildered. She

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came of a homely middle-class stock, accustomed to a small range of thinking, and a high standard of doing. Marcella's political opinions were an amazement, and on the whole a scandal to her. She preferred generally to give them a wide berth.

Marcella did not reply. It was not worth while to talk to Mary on these topics. But Mary stuck to the subject a moment longer.

"You can't want him to get in, though?" she said in a puzzled voice, as she led the way to the little sitting-room across the passage, and took her work-basket out of the cupboard. "It was only the week before last Mr. Raeburn was speaking at the school-room for Mr. Dodgson. You weren't there, Marcella?"

"No," said Marcella, shortly. "I thought you knew perfectly well, Mary, that Mr. Raeburn and I don't agree politically. Certainly, I hope Mr. Wharton will get in!"

Mary opened her eyes in wonderment. She stared at Marcella, forgetting the sock she had just slipped over her left hand, and the darning needle in her right.

Marcella laughed.

"I know you think that two people who are going to be married ought to say ditto to each other in everything. Don't you — you dear old goose?"

She came and stood beside Mary, a stately and beautiful creature in her loosened furs. She stroked Mary's straight sandy hair back from her forehead. Mary looked up at her with a thrill, nay, a passionate throb of envy — soon suppressed.

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"I think," she said steadily, "it is very strange — that love should oppose and disagree with what it loves."

Marcella went restlessly towards the fire and began to examine the things on the mantelpiece.

"Can't people agree to differ, you sentimentalist? Can't they respect each other, without echoing each other on every subject?"

"Respect!" cried Mary, with a sudden scorn, which was startling from a creature so soft.

"There, she could tear me in pieces!" said Marcella, laughing, though her lip was not steady. "I wonder what you would be like, Mary, if you were engaged."

Mary ran her needle in and out with lightning speed for a second or two, then she said almost under her breath —

"I shouldn't be engaged unless I were in love. And if I were in love, why, I would go anywhere — do anything — believe anything — if *he* told me!"

"Believe anything? — Mary — you wouldn't!"

"I don't mean as to religion," said Mary, hastily. "But everything else — I would give it all up! — governing one's self, thinking for one's self. He should do it, and I would *bless* him!"

She looked up crimson, drawing a very long breath, as though from some deep centre of painful, passionate feeling. It was Marcella's turn to stare. Never had Mary so revealed herself before.

"Did you ever love any one like that, Mary?" she asked quickly.

Mary dropped her head again over her work and did not answer immediately.

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"Do you see —" she said at last, with a change of tone, "do you see that we have got our invitation?"

Marcella, about to give the rein to an eager curiosity Mary's manner had excited in her, felt herself pulled up sharply. When she chose, this little meek creature could put on the same unapproachableness as her brother. Marcella submitted.

"Yes, I see;" she said, taking up a card on the mantelpiece. "It will be a great crush. I suppose you know. They have asked the whole county, it seems to me."

The card bore an invitation in Miss Raeburn's name for the Rector and his sister to a dance at Maxwell Court — the date given was the twenty-fifth of January.

"What fun!" said Mary, her eye sparkling. "You needn't suppose that I know enough of balls to be particular. I have only been to one before in my life — ever. That was at Cheltenham. An aunt took me — I didn't dance. There were hardly any men, but I enjoyed it."

"Well, you shall dance this time," said Marcella, "for I will make Mr. Raeburn introduce you."

"Nonsense, you won't have any time to think about me. You will be the queen — everybody will want to speak to you. I shall sit in a corner and look at you — that will be enough for me."

Marcella went up to her quickly and kissed her, then she said, still holding her —

"I know you think I ought to be very happy, Mary!"

"I should think I do!" said Mary, with astonished

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emphasis, when the voice paused — "I should think I do!"

"I *am* happy — and I want to make him happy. But there are so many things, so many different aims and motives, that complicate life, that puzzle one. One doesn't know how much to give of one's self, to each — "

She stood with her hand on Mary's shoulder, looking away towards the window and the snowy garden, her brow frowning and distressed.

"Well, I don't understand," said Mary, after a pause. "As I said before, it seems to me so plain and easy — to be in love, and give one's self *all* — to that. But you are so much cleverer than I, Marcella, you know so much more. That makes the difference. I can't be like you. Perhaps I don't want to be!" — and she laughed. "But I can admire you and love you, and think about you. There, now, tell me what you are going to wear?"

"White satin, and Mr. Raeburn wants me to wear some pearls he is going to give me, some old pearls of his mother's. I believe I shall find them at Mellor when I get back."

There was little girlish pleasure in the tone. It was as though Marcella thought her friend would be more interested in her bit of news than she was herself, and was handing it on to her to please her.

"Isn't there a superstition against doing that — before you're married?" said Mary, doubtfully.

"As if I should mind if there was! But I don't believe there is, or Miss Raeburn would have heard of it. She's a mass of such things. Well! I hope I

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shall behave myself to please her at this function. There are not many things I do to her satisfaction; it's a mercy we're not going to live with her. Lord Maxwell is a dear; but she and I would never get on. Every way of thinking she has, rubs me up the wrong way; and as for her view of me, I am just a tare sown among her wheat. Perhaps she is right enough!"

Marcella leant her cheek pensively on one hand, and with the other played with the things on the mantelpiece.

Mary looked at her, and then half smiled, half sighed.

"I think it is a very good thing you are to be married soon," she said, with her little air of wisdom, which offended nobody. "Then you'll know your own mind. When is it to be?"

"The end of February — after the election."

"Two months," mused Mary.

"Time enough to throw it all up in, you think?" said Marcella, recklessly, putting on her gloves for departure. "Perhaps you'll be pleased to hear that I *am* going to a meeting of Mr. Raeburn's next week?"

"I *am* glad. You ought to go to them all."

"Really, Mary! How am I to lift you out of this squaw theory of matrimony? Allow me to inform you that the following evening I am going to one of Mr. Wharton's — here in the schoolroom!"

She enjoyed her friend's disapproval.

"By yourself, Marcella? It isn't seemly!"

"I shall take a maid. Mr. Wharton is going to

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tell us how the people can — get the land, and how, when they have got it, all the money that used to go in rent will go in taking off taxes and making life comfortable for the poor." She looked at Mary with a teasing smile.

"Oh! I dare say he will make his stealing sound very pretty," said Mary, with unwonted scorn, as she opened the front door for her friend.

Marcella flashed out.

"I know you are a saint, Mary," she said, turning back on the path outside to deliver her last shaft. "I am often not so sure whether you are a Christian!"

Then she hurried off without another word, leaving the flushed and shaken Mary to ponder this strange dictum.

Marcella was just turning into the straight drive which led past the church on the left to Mellor House, when she heard footsteps behind her, and, looking round, she saw Edward Hallin.

"Will you give me some lunch, Miss Boyce, in return for a message? I am here instead of Aldous, who is very sorry for himself, and will be over later. I am to tell you that he went down to the station to meet a certain box. The box did not come, but will come this afternoon; so he waits for it, and will bring it over."

Marcella flushed, smiled, and said she understood. Hallin moved on beside her, evidently glad of the opportunity of a talk with her.

"We are all going together to the Gairsley meeting next week, aren't we? I am so glad you are coming. Aldous will do his best."

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There was something very winning in his tone to her. It implied both his old and peculiar friendship for Aldous, and his eager wish to find a new friend in her — to adopt her into their comradeship. Something very winning, too, in his whole personality — in the loosely knit, nervous figure, the irregular charm of feature, the benignant eyes and brow — even in the suggestions of physical delicacy, cheerfully concealed, yet none the less evident. The whole balance of Marcella's temper changed in some sort as she talked to him. She found herself wanting to please, instead of wanting to conquer, to make an effect.

"You have just come from the village, I think?" said Hallin. "Aldous tells me you take a great interest in the people?"

He looked at her kindly, the look of one who saw all his fellow-creatures nobly, as it were, and to their best advantage.

"One may take an interest," she said, in a dissatisfied voice, poking at the snow crystals on the road before her with the thorn-stick she carried, "but one can do so little. And I don't know anything; not even what I want myself."

"No; one can do next to nothing. And systems and theories don't matter, or, at least, very little. Yet, when you and Aldous are together, there will be more chance of *doing*, for you than for most. You will be two happy and powerful people! His power will be doubled by happiness; I have always known that."

Marcella was seized with shyness, looked away, and did not know what to answer. At last she said

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abruptly — her head still turned to the woods on her left —

"Are you sure he is going to be happy?"

"Shall I produce his letter to me?" he said, bantering — "or letters? For I knew a great deal about you before October 5" (their engagement-day), "and suspected what was going to happen long before Aldous did. No; after all, no! Those letters are my last bit of the old friendship. But the new began that same day," he hastened to add, smiling: "It may be richer than the old; I don't know. It depends on you."

"I don't think — I am a very satisfactory friend," said Marcella, still awkward, and speaking with difficulty.

"Well, let me find out, won't you? I don't think Aldous would call me exacting. I believe he would give me a decent character, though I tease him a good deal. You must let me tell you sometime what he did for me — what he was to me — at Cambridge? I shall always feel sorry for Aldous's wife that she did not know him at college."

A shock went through Marcella at the word — that tremendous word — wife. As Hallin said it, there was something intolerable in the claim it made!

"I should like you to tell me," she said faintly. Then she added, with more energy and a sudden advance of friendliness, "But you really must come in and rest. Aldous told me he thought the walk from the Court was too much for you. Shall we take this short way?"

And she opened a little gate leading to a door at

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the side of the house through the Cedar Garden. The narrow path only admitted of single file, and Hallin followed her, admiring her tall youth and the fine black and white of her head and cheek as she turned every now and then to speak to him. He realised more vividly than before the rare, exciting elements of her beauty, and the truth in Aldous's comparison of her to one of the tall women in a Florentine fresco. But he felt himself a good deal baffled by her, all the same. In some ways, so far as any man who is not the lover can understand such things, he understood why Aldous had fallen in love with her; in others, she bore no relation whatever to the woman his thoughts had been shaping all these years as his friend's fit and natural wife.

Luncheon passed as easily as any meal could be expected to do, of which Mr. Boyce was partial president. During the preceding month or two he had definitely assumed the character of an invalid, although to inexperienced eyes like Marcella's there did not seem to be very much the matter. But, whatever the facts might be, Mr. Boyce's adroit use of them had made a great difference to his position in his own household. His wife's sarcastic freedom of manner was less apparent; and he was obviously less in awe of her. Meanwhile he was as sore as ever towards the Raeburns, and no more inclined to take any particular pleasure in Marcella's prospects, or to make himself agreeable towards his future son-in-law. He and Mrs. Boyce had been formally asked in Miss Raeburn's best hand to the Court ball, but he had at once snappishly announced his intention of staying at

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home. Marcella sometimes looked back with astonishment to his eagerness for social notice when they first came to Mellor. Clearly the rising irritability of illness had made it doubly unpleasant to him to owe all that he was likely to get on that score to his own daughter; and, moreover, he had learnt to occupy himself more continuously on his own land and with his own affairs.

As to the state of the village, neither Marcella's entreaties nor reproaches had any effect upon him. When it appeared certain that he would be summoned for some specially flagrant piece of neglect he would spend a few shillings on repairs; otherwise not a farthing. All that filial softening towards him of which Marcella had been conscious in the early autumn had died away in her. She said to herself now plainly and bitterly that it was a misfortune to belong to him; and she would have pitied her mother most heartily if her mother had ever allowed her the smallest expression of such a feeling. As it was, she was left to wonder and chafe at her mother's newborn mildness.

In the drawing-room, after luncheon, Hallin came up to Marcella in a corner, and, smiling, drew from his pocket a folded sheet of foolscap.

"I made Aldous give me his speech to show you, before to-morrow night," he said. "He would hardly let me take it, said it was stupid, and that you would not agree with it. But I wanted you to see how he does these things. He speaks now, on an average, two or three times a week. Each time, even for an audience of a score or two of village folk, he writes

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out what he has to say. Then he speaks it entirely without notes. In this way, though he has not much natural gift, he is making himself gradually an effective and practical speaker. The danger with him, of course, is lest he should be over-subtle and over-critical — not simple and popular enough."

Marcella took the paper half unwillingly and glanced over it in silence.

"You are sorry he is a Tory, is that it?" he said to her, but in a lower voice, and sitting down beside her.

Mrs. Boyce, just catching the words from where she sat with her work, at the further side of the room, looked up with a double wonder — wonder at Marcella's folly, wonder still more at the deference with which men like Aldous Raeburn and Hallin treated her. It was inevitable, of course — youth and beauty rule the world. But the mother, under no spell herself, and of keen, cool wit, resented the intellectual confusion, the lowering of standards involved.

"I suppose so," said Marcella, stupidly, in answer to Hallin's question, fidgeting the papers under her hand. Then his curious confessor's gift, his quiet questioning look with its sensitive human interest to all before him, told upon her.

"I am sorry he does not look further ahead, to the great changes that must come," she added hurriedly. "This is all about details, palliatives. I want him to be more impatient."

"Great political changes you mean?"

She nodded; then added —

"But only for the sake, of course, of great social changes to come after."

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He pondered a moment.

"Aldous has never believed in *great* changes coming suddenly. He constantly looks upon me as rash in the things *I* adopt and believe in. But for the contriving, unceasing effort of every day to make that part of the social machine in which a man finds himself work better and more equitably, I have never seen Aldous's equal — for the steady passion, the persistence, of it."

She looked up. His pale face had taken to itself glow and fire; his eyes were full of strenuous, nay, severe expression. Her foolish pride rebelled a little.

"Of course, I haven't seen much of that yet," she said slowly.

His look for a moment was indignant, incredulous, then melted into a charming eagerness.

"But you will! naturally you will! — see everything. I hug myself sometimes now for pure pleasure that some one besides his grandfather and I will know what Aldous is and does. Oh! the people on the estate know; his neighbours are beginning to know; and now that he is going into Parliament, the country will know some day, if work and high intelligence have the power I believe. But I am impatient! In the first place — I may say it to you, Miss Boyce! — I want Aldous to come out of that *manner* of his to strangers, which is the only bit of the true Tory in him; *you* can get rid of it, no one else can — How long shall I give you? — And in the next, I want the world not to be wasting itself on baser stuff when it might be praising Aldous!"

"Does he mean Mr. Wharton?" thought Marcella,

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quickly. "But this world — our world — hates him and runs him down."

But she had no time to answer, for the door opened to admit Aldous, flushed and bright-eyed, looking round the room immediately for her, and bearing a parcel in his left hand.

"Does she love him at all?" thought Hallin, with a nervous stiffening of all his lithe frame, as he walked away to talk to Mrs. Boyce, "or, in spite of all her fine talk, is she just marrying him for his money and position!"

Meanwhile, Aldous had drawn Marcella into the Stone Parlour and was standing by the fire with his arm covetously round her.

"I have lost two hours with you I might have had, just because a tiresome man missed his train. Make up for it by liking these pretty things a little, for my sake and my mother's."

He opened the jeweller's case, took out the fine old pearls — necklace and bracelets — it contained, and put them into her hand. They were his first considerable gift to her, and had been chosen for association's sake, seeing that his mother had also worn them before her marriage.

She flushed first of all with a natural pleasure, the girl delighting in her gaud. Then she allowed herself to be kissed, which was, indeed, inevitable. Finally she turned them over and over in her hands; and he began to be puzzled by her.

"They are much too good for me. I don't know whether you ought to give me such precious things. I am dreadfully careless and forgetful. Mamma always says so."

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"I shall want you to wear them so often that you won't have a chance of forgetting them," he said gaily.

"Will you? Will you want me to wear them so often?" she asked, in an odd voice. "Anyway, I should like to have just these, and nothing else. I am glad that we know nobody, and have no friends, and that I shall have so few presents. You won't give me many jewels, will you?" she said suddenly, insistently, turning to him. "I shouldn't know what to do with them. I used to have a magpie's wish for them; and now — I don't know, but they don't give me pleasure. Not these, of course — not these!" she added hurriedly, taking them up and beginning to fasten the bracelets on her wrists.

Aldous looked perplexed.

"My darling!" he said, half laughing, and in the tone of the apologist, "You know we *have* such a lot of things. And I am afraid my grandfather will want to give them all to you. Need one think so much about it? It isn't as though they had to be bought fresh. They go with pretty gowns, don't they, and other people like to see them?"

"No, but it's what they imply — the wealth — the *having* so much while other people want so much. Things begin to oppress me so!" she broke out, instinctively moving away from him that she might express herself with more energy. "I like luxuries so desperately, and when I get them I seem to myself now the vulgarest creature alive, who has no right to an opinion or an enthusiasm, or anything else worth having. You must not let me like them — you must help me not to care about them!"

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Raeburn's eye as he looked at her was tenderness itself. He could of course neither mock her, nor put what she said aside. This question she had raised, this most thorny of all the personal questions of the present — the ethical relation of the individual to the World's Fair and its vanities — was, as it happened, a question far more sternly and robustly real to him than it was to her. Every word in his few sentences, as they stood talking by the fire, bore on it for a practised ear the signs of a long wrestle of the heart.

But to Marcella it sounded tame; her ear was haunted by the fragments of another tune which she seemed to be perpetually trying to recall and piece together. Aldous's slow minor made her impatient.

He turned presently to ask her what she had been doing with her morning — asking her with a certain precision, and observing her attentively. She replied that she had been showing Mr. Wharton the house, that he had walked down with her to the village, and was gone to a meeting at Widrington. Then she remarked that he was very good company, and very clever, but dreadfully sure of his own opinion. Finally she laughed, and said drily:

"There will be no putting him down all the same. I haven't told anybody yet, but he saved my life this morning."

Aldous caught her wrists.

"Saved your life! Dear — What *do* you mean?"

She explained, giving the little incident all — perhaps more than — its dramatic due. He listened with evident annoyance, and stood pondering when she came to an end.

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"So I shall be expected to take quite a different view of him henceforward?" he inquired at last, looking round at her, with a very forced smile.

"I am sure I don't know that it matters to him what view anybody takes of him," she cried, flushing. "He certainly takes the frankest views of other people, and expresses them."

And while she played with the pearls in their box she gave a vivid account of her morning's talk with the Radical candidate for West Brookshire, and of their village expedition.

There was a certain relief in describing the scorn with which her acts and ideals had been treated; and, underneath, a woman's curiosity as to how Aldous would take it.

"I don't know what business he had to express himself so frankly," said Aldous, turning to the fire and carefully putting it together. "He hardly knows you — it was, I think, an impertinence."

He stood upright, with his back to the hearth, a strong, capable, frowning Englishman, very much on his dignity. Such a moment must surely have become him in the eyes of a girl that loved him. Marcella proved restive under it.

"No; it's very natural," she protested quickly. "When people are so much in earnest they don't stop to think about impertinence! I never met any one who dug up one's thoughts by the roots as he does."

Aldous was startled by her flush, her sudden attitude of opposition. His intermittent lack of readiness overtook him, and there was an awkward silence. Then, pulling himself together with a strong hand,

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he left the subject and began to talk of her straw-plaiting scheme, of the Gairsley meeting, and of Hallin. But in the middle Marcella unexpectedly said:

"I wish you would tell me, seriously, what reasons you have for not liking Mr. Wharton? — other than politics, I mean?"

Her black eyes fixed him with a keen insistence.

He was silent a moment with surprise; then he said:

"I had rather not rake up old scores."

She shrugged her shoulders, and he was roused to come and put his arm round her again, she shrinking and turning her reddened face away.

"Dearest," he said, "you shall put me in charity with all the world. But the worst of it is," he added, half laughing, "that I don't see how I am to help disliking him doubly henceforward for having had the luck to put that fire out instead of me!"

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CHAPTER VI.

A FEW busy and eventful weeks, days never forgotten by Marcella in after years, passed quickly by. Parliament met in the third week of January. Ministers, according to universal expectation, found themselves confronted by a damaging amendment on the Address, and were defeated by a small majority. A dissolution and appeal to the country followed immediately, and the meetings and speech-makings, already active throughout the constituencies, were carried forward with redoubled energy. In the Tudley End division, Aldous Raeburn was fighting a somewhat younger opponent of the same country-gentleman stock — a former fag indeed of his at Eton — whose zeal and fluency gave him plenty to do. Under ordinary circumstances Aldous would have thrown himself with all his heart and mind into a contest which involved for him the most stimulating of possibilities, personal and public. But, as these days went over, he found his appetite for the struggle flagging, and was harassed rather than spurred by his adversary's activity. The real truth was that he could not see enough of Marcella! A curious uncertainty and unreality, moreover, seemed to have crept into some of their relations; and it had begun to gall and fever him that Wharton should be staying

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there, week after week, beside her, in her father's house, able to spend all the free intervals of the fight in her society, strengthening an influence which Raeburn's pride and delicacy had hardly allowed him as yet, in spite of his instinctive jealousy from the beginning, to take into his thoughts at all, but which was now apparent, not only to himself but to others.

In vain did he spend every possible hour at Mellor he could snatch from a conflict in which his party, his grandfather, and his own personal fortunes were all deeply interested. In vain — with a tardy instinct that it was to Mr. Boyce's dislike of himself, and to the wilful fancy for Wharton's society which this dislike had promoted, that Wharton's long stay at Mellor was largely owing — did Aldous subdue himself to propitiations and amenities wholly foreign to a strong character long accustomed to rule without thinking about it. Mr. Boyce showed himself not a whit less partial to Wharton than before; pressed him at least twice in Raeburn's hearing to make Mellor his headquarters so long as it suited him, and behaved with an irritable malice with regard to some of the details of the wedding arrangements, which neither Mrs. Boyce's indignation nor Marcella's discomfort and annoyance could restrain. Clearly there was in him a strong consciousness that by his attentions to the Radical candidate he was asserting his independence of the Raeburns, and nothing for the moment seemed to be more of an object with him, even though his daughter was going to marry the Raeburns' heir. Meanwhile, Wharton was always ready to walk or chat or play billiards with his host in the intervals of his own cam-

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paign; and his society had thus come to count considerably among the scanty daily pleasures of a sickly and disappointed man. Mrs. Boyce did not like her guest, and took no pains to disguise it, least of all from Wharton. But it seemed to be no longer possible for her to take the vigorous measures she would once have taken to get rid of him.

In vain, too, did Miss Raeburn do her best for the nephew to whom she was still devoted, in spite of his deplorable choice of a wife. She took in the situation as a whole probably sooner than anybody else, and she instantly made heroic efforts to see more of Marcella, to get her to come oftener to the Court, and in many various ways to procure the poor deluded Aldous more of his betrothed's society. She paid many chattering and fussy visits to Mellor — visits which chafed Marcella — and before long, indeed, roused a certain suspicion in the girl's wilful mind. Between Miss Raeburn and Mrs. Boyce there was a curious understanding. It was always tacit, and never amounted to friendship, still less to intimacy. But it often yielded a certain melancholy consolation to Aldous Raeburn's great-aunt. It was clear to her that this strange mother was just as much convinced as she was that Aldous was making a great mistake, and that Marcella was not worthy of him. But the engagement being there — a fact not apparently to be undone — both ladies showed themselves disposed to take pains with it, to protect it against aggression. Mrs. Boyce found herself becoming more of a *chaperon* than she had ever yet professed to be; and Miss Raeburn, as we have said, made repeated efforts to capture Marcella and hold her for Aldous, her lawful master.

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But Marcella proved extremely difficult to manage. In the first place she was a young person of many engagements. Her village scheme absorbed a great deal of time. She was deep in a varied correspondence, in the engagement of teachers, the provision of work-rooms, the collecting and registering of workers, the organisation of local committees and so forth. New sides of the girl's character, new capacities and capabilities were coming out; new forms of her natural power over her fellows were developing every day; she was beginning, under the incessant stimulus of Wharton's talk, to read and think on social and economic subjects, with some system and coherence, and it was evident that she took a passionate mental pleasure in it all. And the more pleasure these activities gave her, the less she had to spare for those accompaniments of her engagement and her position that was to be, which once, as Mrs. Boyce's sharp eyes perceived, had been quite normally attractive to her.

"Why do you take up her time so, with all these things?" said Miss Raeburn impatiently to Lady Winterbourne, who was now Marcella's obedient helper in everything she chose to initiate. "She doesn't care for anything she *ought* to care about at this time, and Aldous sees nothing of her. As for her trousseau, Mrs. Boyce declares she has had to do it all. Marcella won't even go up to London to have her wedding-dress fitted!"

Lady Winterbourne looked up bewildered.

"But I can't make her go and have her wedding-dress fitted, Agneta! And I always feel you don't know what a fine creature she is. You don't really

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appreciate her. It's splendid the ideas she has about this work, and the way she throws herself into it."

"I dare say!" said Miss Raeburn, indignantly. "That's just what I object to. Why can't she throw herself into being in love with Aldous! That's her business, I imagine, just now — if she were a young woman like anybody else one had ever seen — instead of holding aloof from everything he does, and never being there when he wants her. Oh! I have no patience with her. But, of course, I must —" said Miss Raeburn, hastily correcting herself — "of course, I must have patience."

"It will all come right, I am sure, when they are married," said Lady Winterbourne, rather helplessly.

"That's just what my brother says," cried Miss Raeburn, exasperated. "He won't hear a word — declares she is odd and original, and that Aldous will soon know how to manage her. It's all very well; nowadays men *don't* manage their wives; that's all gone with the rest. And I am sure, my dear, if she behaves after she is married as she is doing now, with that most objectionable person Mr. Wharton — walking, and talking, and taking up his ideas, and going to his meetings — she'll be a handful for any husband."

"Mr. Wharton!" said Lady Winterbourne, astonished. Her absent black eyes, the eyes of the dreamer, of the person who lives by a few intense affections, saw little or nothing of what was going on immediately under them. "Oh! but that is because he is staying in the house, and he is a Socialist; she calls herself one —"

"My *dear*," said Miss Raeburn, interrupting em

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phatically; "if — you — had — now — an unmarried daughter at home — engaged or not — would you care to have Harry Wharton hanging about after her?"

"Harry Wharton?" said the other, pondering; "he is the Levens' cousin, isn't he? he used to stay with them. I don't think I have seen him since then. But yes, I do remember; there was something — something disagreeable?"

She stopped with a hesitating, interrogative air. No one talked less scandal, no one put the uglinesses of life away from her with a hastier hand than Lady Winterbourne. She was one of the most consistent of moral epicures.

"Yes, *extremely* disagreeable," said Miss Raeburn, sitting bolt upright. "The man has no principles — never had any, since he was a child in petticoats. I know Aldous thinks him unscrupulous in politics and everything else. And then, just when you are worked to death, and have hardly a moment for your own affairs, to have a man of that type always at hand to spend odd times with your lady love — flattering her, engaging her in his ridiculous schemes, encouraging her in all the extravagances she has got her head twice too full of already, setting her against your own ideas and the life she will have to live — you will admit that it is not exactly soothing!"

"Poor Aldous!" said Lady Winterbourne, thoughtfully, looking far ahead with her odd look of absent rigidity, which had in reality so little to do with a character essentially soft; "but you see he *did* know all about her opinions. And I don't think — no, I really don't think — I could speak to her."

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In truth, this woman of nearly seventy — old in years, but wholly young in temperament — was altogether under Marcella's spell — more at ease with her already than with most of her own children, finding in her satisfaction for a hundred instincts, suppressed or starved by her own environment, fascinated by the girl's friendship, and eagerly grateful for her visits. Miss Raeburn thought it all both incomprehensible and silly.

"Apparently no one can!" cried that lady in answer to her friend's demurrer; "is all the world afraid of her?"

And she departed in wrath. But she knew, nevertheless, that she was just as much afraid of Marcella as anybody else. In her own sphere at the Court, or in points connected with what was due to the family, or to Lord Maxwell especially, as the head of it, this short, capable old lady could hold her own amply with Aldous's betrothed, could maintain, indeed, a sharp and caustic dignity, which kept Marcella very much in order. Miss Raeburn, on the defensive, was strong; but when it came to attacking Marcella's own ideas and proceedings, Lord Maxwell's sister became shrewdly conscious of her own weaknesses. She had no wish to measure her wits on any general field with Marcella's. She said to herself that the girl was too clever and would talk you down.

Meanwhile, things went untowardly in various ways. Marcella disciplined herself before the Gairsley meeting, and went thither resolved to give Aldous as much sympathy as she could. But the performance only repelled a mind over which Wharton was

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every day gaining more influence. There was a portly baronet in the chair; there were various Primrose Dames on the platform and among the audience; there was a considerable representation of clergy; and the labourers present seemed to Marcella the most obsequious of their kind. Aldous spoke well — or so the audience seemed to think; but she could feel no enthusiasm for anything that he said. She gathered that he advocated a Government inspection of cottages, more stringent precautions against cattle disease, better technical instruction, a more abundant provision of allotments and small freeholds, &c.; and he said many cordial and wise-sounding things in praise of a progress which should go safely and wisely from step to step, and run no risks of dangerous reaction. But the assumptions on which, as she told herself rebelliously, it all went — that the rich and the educated must rule, and the poor obey; that existing classes and rights, the forces of individualism and competition, must and would go on pretty much as they were; that great houses and great people, the English land and game system, and all the rest of our odious class paraphernalia were in the order of the universe; these ideas, conceived as the furniture of Aldous's mind, threw her again into a ferment of passionate opposition. And when the noble baronet in the chair — to her eye, a pompous, frock-coated stick, sacrificing his after-dinner sleep for once, that he might the more effectually secure it in the future — proposed a vote of confidence in the Conservative candidate; when the vote was carried with much cheering and rattling of feet; when the Primrose

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Dames on the platform smiled graciously down upon the meeting as one smiles at good children in their moments of pretty behaviour; and when, finally, scores of toil-stained labourers, young and old, went up to have a word and a hand-shake with "Muster Raeburn," Marcella held herself aloof and cold, with a look that threatened sarcasm should she be spoken to. Miss Raeburn, glancing furtively round at her, was outraged anew by her expression.

"She will be a thorn in all our sides," thought that lady. "Aldous is a fool!—a poor dear noble misguided fool!"

Then on the way home, she and Aldous drove together. Marcella tried to argue, grew vehement, and said bitter things for the sake of victory, till at last Aldous, tired, worried, and deeply wounded, could bear it no longer.

"Let it be, dear, let it be!" he entreated, snatching at her hand as they rolled along through a stormy night. "We grope in a dark world—you see some points of light in it, I see others—won't you give me credit for doing what I can—seeing what I can? I am sure—*sure*—you will find it easier to bear with differences when we are quite together—when there are no longer all these hateful duties and engagements—and persons—between us."

"Persons! I don't know what you mean!" said Marcella.

Aldous only just restrained himself in time. Out of sheer fatigue and slackness of nerve he had been all but betrayed into some angry speech on the subject of Wharton, the echoes of whose fantastic talk, as it

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seemed to him, were always hanging about Mellor when he went there. But he did refrain, and was thankful. That he was indeed jealous and disturbed, that he had been jealous and disturbed from the moment Harry Wharton had set foot in Mellor, he himself knew quite well. But to play the jealous part in public was more than the Raeburn pride could bear. There was the dread, too, of defining the situation — of striking some vulgar irrevocable note.

So he parried Marcella's exclamation by asking her whether she had any idea how many human hands a parliamentary candidate had to shake between breakfast and bed; and then, having so slipped into another tone, he tried to amuse himself and her by some of the daily humours of the contest. She lent herself to it and laughed, her look mostly turned away from him, as though she were following the light of the carriage lamps as it slipped along the snow-laden hedges, her hand lying limply in his. But neither were really gay. His soreness of mind grew as in the pauses of talk he came to realise more exactly the failure of the evening — of his very successful and encouraging meeting — from his own private point of view.

"Didn't you like that last speech?" he broke out suddenly — "that labourer's speech? I thought you would. It was entirely his own idea — nobody asked him to do it."

In reality Gairsley represented a corner of the estate which Aldous had specially made his own. He had spent much labour and thought on the improvement of what had been a backward district, and in particular

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he had tried a small profit-sharing experiment upon a farm there which he had taken into his own hands for the purpose. The experiment had met with fair success, and the labourer in question, who was one of the workers in it, had volunteered some approving remarks upon it at the meeting.

"Oh! it was very proper and respectful!" said Marcella, hastily.

The carriage rolled on some yards before Aldous replied. Then he spoke in a drier tone than he had ever yet used to her.

"You do it injustice, I think. The man is perfectly independent, and an honest fellow. I was grateful to him for what he said."

"Of course, I am no judge!" cried Marcella, quickly — repentantly. "Why did you ask me? I saw everything crooked, I suppose — it was your Primrose Dames — they got upon my nerves. Why did you have them? I didn't mean to vex and hurt you — I didn't indeed — it was all the other way — and now I have."

She turned upon him laughing, but also half crying, as he could tell by the flutter of her breath.

He vowed he was not hurt, and once more changed both talk and tone. They reached the drive's end without a word of Wharton. But Marcella went to bed hating herself, and Aldous, after his solitary drive home, sat up long and late, feverishly pacing and thinking.

Then next evening how differently things fell!

Marcella, having spent the afternoon at the Court,

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hearing all the final arrangements for the ball, and bearing with Miss Raeburn in a way which astonished herself, came home full of a sense of duty done, and announced to her mother that she was going to Mr. Wharton's meeting in the Baptist chapel that evening.

"Unnecessary, don't you think?" said Mrs. Boyce, lifting her eyebrows. "However, if you go, I shall go with you."

Most mothers, dealing with a girl of twenty-one, under the circumstances, would have said, "I had rather you stayed at home." Mrs. Boyce never employed locutions of this kind. She recognised with perfect calmness that Marcella's bringing up, and especially her independent years in London, had made it impossible.

Marcella fidgeted.

"I don't know why you should, mamma. Papa will be sure to want you. Of course, I shall take Deacon."

"Please order dinner a quarter of an hour earlier, and tell Deacon to bring down my walking things to the hall," was all Mrs. Boyce said in answer.

Marcella walked upstairs with her head very stiff. So her mother, and Miss Raeburn too, thought it necessary to keep watch on her. How preposterous! She thought of her free and easy relations with her Kensington student-friends, and wondered when a more reasonable idea of the relations between men and women would begin to penetrate English country society.

Mr. Boyce talked recklessly of going too.

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"Of course, I know he will spout seditious nonsense," he said irritably to his wife, "but it's the fellow's power of talk that is so astonishing. *He* isn't troubled with your Raeburn heaviness."

Marcella came into the room as the discussion was going on.

"If papa goes," she said in an undertone to her mother as she passed her, "it will spoil the meeting. The labourers will turn sulky. I shouldn't wonder if they did or said something unpleasant. As it is, *you* had much better not come, mamma. They are sure to attack the cottages — and other things."

Mrs. Boyce took no notice as far as she herself was concerned, but her quiet decision at last succeeded in leaving Mr. Boyce safely settled by the fire, provided as usual with a cigarette and a French novel.

The meeting was held in a little iron Baptist chapel, erected some few years before on the outskirts of the village, to the grief and scandal of Mr. Harden. There were about a hundred and twenty labourers present, and at the back some boys and girls, come to giggle and make a noise — nobody else. The Baptist minister, a smooth-faced young man, possessed, as it turned out, of opinions little short of Wharton's own in point of vigour and rigour, was already in command. A few late comers, as they slouched in, stole side looks at Marcella and the veiled lady in black beside her, sitting in the corner of the last bench; and Marcella nodded to one or two of the audience, Jim Hurd amongst them. Otherwise no one took any notice of them. It was the first time that Mrs. Boyce had been inside any building belonging to the village.

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Wharton arrived late. He had been canvassing at a distance, and neither of the Mellor ladies had seen him all day. He slipped up the bench with a bow and a smile to greet them. "I am done!" he said to Marcella, as he took off his hat. "My voice is gone, my mind ditto. I shall drivel for half an hour and let them go. Did you ever see such a stolid set?"

"You will rouse them," said Marcella.

Her eyes were animated, her colour high, and she took no account at all of his plea of weariness.

"You challenge me? I must rouse them — that was what you came to see? Is that it?"

She laughed and made no answer. He left her and went up to the minister's desk, the men shuffling their feet a little, and rattling a stick here and there as he did so.

The young minister took the chair and introduced the speaker. He had a strong Yorkshire accent, and his speech was divided between the most vehement attacks, couched in the most Scriptural language, upon capital and privilege — that is to say, on landlords and the land system, on State churches and the "idle rich," interspersed with quavering returns upon himself, as though he were scared by his own invective. "My brothers, let us be *calm!*" he would say after every burst of passion, with a long deep-voiced emphasis on the last word; "let us, above all things, be *calm!*" — and then bit by bit voice and denunciation would begin to mount again towards a fresh climax of loud-voiced attack, only to sink again to the same lamb-like refrain. Mrs. Boyce's thin lip twitched,

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and Marcella bore the good gentleman a grudge for providing her mother with so much unnecessary amusement.

As for Wharton, at the opening of his speech he spoke both awkwardly and flatly; and Marcella had a momentary shock. He was, as he said, tired, and his wits were not at command. He began with the general political programme of the party to which — on its extreme left wing — he proclaimed himself to belong. This programme was, of course, by now a newspaper commonplace of the stalest sort. He himself recited it without enthusiasm, and it was received without a spark, so far as appeared, of interest or agreement. The minister gave an "hear, hear," of a loud official sort; the men made no sign.

"They might be a set of Dutch cheeses!" thought Marcella, indignantly, after a while. "But, after all, why should they care for all this? I shall have to get up in a minute and stop those children romping."

But through all this, as it were, Wharton was only waiting for his second wind. There came a moment when, dropping his quasi-official and high political tone, he said suddenly with another voice and emphasis:

"Well now, my men, I'll be bound you're thinking, 'That's all pretty enough! — we haven't got anything against it — we dare say it's all right; but we don't care a brass ha'porth about any of it! If that's all you'd got to say to us, you might have let us bide at home. We don't have none too much time to rest our bones a bit by the fire, and talk to the missus and the kids. Why didn't you let us alone, instead of bringing us out in the cold?'

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"Well, but it *isn't* all I've got to say — and you know it — because I've spoken to you before. What I've been talking about is all true, and all important, and you'll see it some day when you're fit. But what can men in your position know about it, or care about it? What do any of you want, but *bread* — "

— He thundered on the desk —

"— a bit of decent *comfort* — a bit of *freedom* — freedom from tyrants who call themselves your betters! — a bit of rest in your old age, a home that's something better than a dog-hole, a wage that's something better than starvation, an honest share in the wealth you are making every day and every hour for other people to gorge and plunder!"

He stopped a moment to see how *that* took. A knot of young men in a corner rattled their sticks vigorously. The older men had begun at any rate to look at the speaker. The boys on the back benches instinctively stopped scuffling.

Then he threw himself into a sort of rapid question-and-answer. What were their wages? — eleven shillings a week?

"Not they!" cried a man from the middle of the chapel. "Yer mus' reckon it wet an' dry. I wor turned back two days las' week, an' two days this, *fower* shillin' lost each week — that's what I call skinnin' ov yer."

Wharton nodded at him approvingly. By now he knew the majority of the men in each village by name, and never forgot a face or a biography. "You're right there, Watkins. Eleven shillings, then, when it isn't less, never more, and precious

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often less; and harvest money — the people that are kind enough to come round and ask you to vote Tory for them make a deal of that, don't they? — and a few odds and ends here and there — precious few of them! There! that's about it for wages, isn't it? Thirty pounds a year, somewhere about, to keep a wife and children on — and for ten hours a day work, not counting meal times — that's it, I think. Oh, you *are* well off! — aren't you?"

He dropped his arms, folded, on the desk in front of him, and paused to look at them, his bright kindling eye running over rank after rank. A chuckle of rough laughter, bitter and jeering, ran through the benches. Then they broke out and applauded him.

Well, and about their cottages?

His glance caught Marcella, passed to her mother sitting stiffly motionless under her veil. He drew himself up, thought a moment, then threw himself far forward again over the desk as though the better to launch what he had to say, his voice taking a grinding determined note.

He had been in all parts of the division, he said; seen everything, inquired into everything. No doubt, on the great properties there had been a good deal done of late years — public opinion had effected something, the landlords had been forced to disgorge some of the gains wrested from labour, to pay for the decent housing of the labourer. But did anybody suppose that *enough* had been done? Why, he had seen *dens* — aye, on the best properties — not fit for the pigs that the farmers wouldn't let the labourers keep, lest they should steal their straw for the littering of

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them! — where a man was bound to live the life of a beast, and his children after him —

A tall thin man of about sixty rose in his place, and pointed a long quavering finger at the speaker.

"What is it, Darwin? speak up!" said Wharton, dropping at once into the colloquial tone, and stooping forward to listen.

"My sleepin' room 's six foot nine by seven foot six. We have to shift our bed for the rain 's comin' in, an' yer may see for yoursels ther ain't much room to shift it in. An' beyont us ther 's a room for the chillen, same size as ourn, an' no window, nothin' but the door into us. Ov a summer night the chillen, three on 'em, is all of a sweat afore they're asleep. An' no garden, an' no chance o' decent ways nohow. An' if yer ask for a bit o' repairs yer get sworn at. An' that's all that most on us can get out of Squire Boyce!"

There was a hasty whisper among some of the men round him, as they glanced over their shoulders at the two ladies on the back bench. One or two of them half rose, and tried to pull him down. Wharton looked at Marcella; it seemed to him he saw a sort of passionate satisfaction on her pale face, and in the erect carriage of her head. Then she stooped to the side and whispered to her mother. Mrs. Boyce shook her head and sat on, immovable. All this took but a second or two.

"Ah, well," said Wharton, "we won't have names; that'll do us no good. It's not the *men* you've got to go for so much — though we shall go for them too before long when we've got the law more on our side.

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It's the system. It's the whole way of dividing the wealth that *you* made, you and your children — by your work, your hard, slavish, incessant work — between you and those who *don't* work, who live on your labour and grow fat on your poverty! What we want is *a fair division.* There *ought* to be wealth enough — there *is* wealth enough for all in this blessed country. The earth gives it; the sun gives it: labour extracts and piles it up. Why should one class take three-fourths of it and leave you and your fellow-workers in the cities the miserable pittance which is all you have to starve and breed on? Why? — *why?* I say. Why! — because you are a set of dull, jealous, poor-spirited *cowards,* unable to pull together, to trust each other, to give up so much as a pot of beer a week for the sake of your children and your liberties and your class — there, *that's* why it is, and I tell it you straight out!"

He drew himself up, folded his arms across his chest, and looked at them — scorn and denunciation in every line of his young frame, and the blaze of his blue eye. A murmur ran through the room. Some of the men laughed excitedly. Darwin sprang up again.

"You keep the perlice off us, an' gie us the cuttin' up o' their bloomin' parks an' we'll do it fast enough," he cried.

"Much good that'll do you, just at present," said Wharton, contemptuously. "Now, you just listen to me."

And, leaning forward over the desk again, his finger pointed at the room, he went through the regular Socialist programme as it affects the country districts —

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the transference of authority within the villages from the few to the many, the landlords taxed more and more heavily during the transition time for the provision of house room, water, light, education and amusement for the labourer; and ultimately land and capital at the free disposal of the State, to be supplied to the worker on demand at the most moderate terms, while the annexed rent and interest of the capitalist class relieves him of taxes, and the disappearance of squire, State parson, and plutocrat leaves him master in his own house, the slave of no man, the equal of all. And, as a first step to this new Jerusalem — *organisation!* — self-sacrifice enough to form and maintain a union, to vote for Radical and Socialist candidates in the teeth of the people who have coals and blankets to give away.

"Then I suppose you think you'd be turned out of your cottages, dismissed your work, made to smart for it somehow. Just you try! There are people all over the country ready to back you, if you'd only back yourselves. But you *won't*. You won't fight — that's the worst of you; that's what makes all of us *sick* when we come down to talk to you. You won't spare twopence halfpenny a week from boozing — not you! — to subscribe to a union, and take the first little step towards filling your stomachs and holding your heads up as free men. What's the good of your grumbling? I suppose you'll go on like that — grumbling and starving and cringing — and talking big of the things you could do if you would: — and all the time not one honest effort — not one! — to better yourselves, to pull the yoke off your necks! By the Lord! I tell

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you it's a *damned* sort of business talking to fellows like you!"

Marcella started as he flung the words out with a bitter, nay, a brutal, emphasis. The smooth-faced minister coughed loudly with a sudden movement, half got up to remonstrate, and then thought better of it. Mrs. Boyce for the first time showed some animation under her veil. Her eyes followed the speaker with a quick attention.

As for the men, as they turned clumsily to stare at, to laugh, or talk to each other, Marcella could hardly make out whether they were angered or fascinated. Whichever it was, Wharton cared for none of them. His blood was up; his fatigue thrown off. Standing there in front of them, his hands in his pockets, pale with the excitement of speaking, his curly head thrown out against the whitened wall of the chapel, he lashed into the men before him, talking their language, their dialect even; laying bare their weaknesses, sensualities, indecisions; painting in the sombrest colours the grim truths of their melancholy lives.

Marcella could hardly breathe. It seemed to her that, among these cottagers, she had never lived till now — under the blaze of these eyes — within the vibration of this voice. Never had she so realised the power of this singular being. He was scourging, dissecting, the weather-beaten men before him, as, with a difference, he had scourged, dissected her. She found herself exulting in his powers of tyranny, in the naked thrust of his words, so nervous, so pitiless. And then by a sudden flash she thought of him by Mrs. Hurd's fire, the dying child on his knee, against

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his breast. "Here," she thought, while her pulses leapt, "is the leader for me — for these. Let him call, I will follow."

It was as though he followed the ranging of her thought, for suddenly, when she and his hearers least expected it, his tone changed, his storm of speech sank. He fell into a strain of quiet sympathy, encouragement, hope; dwelt with a good deal of homely iteration on the immediate practical steps which each man before him could, if he would, take towards the common end; spoke of the help and support lying ready for the country labourers throughout democratic England if they would but put forward their own energies and quit themselves like men; pointed forward to a time of plenty, education, social peace; and so — with some good-tempered banter of his opponent, old Dodgson, and some precise instructions as to how and where they were to record their votes on the day of election — came to an end. Two or three other speeches followed, and among them a few stumbling words from Hurd. Marcella approved herself and applauded him, as she recognised a sentence or two taken bodily from the *Labour Clarion* of the preceding week. Then a resolution pledging the meeting to support the Liberal candidate was passed unanimously amid evident excitement. It was the first time that such a thing had ever happened in Mellor.

Mrs. Boyce treated her visitor on their way home with a new respect, mixed, however, as usual, with her prevailing irony. For one who knew her, her manner implied, not that she liked him any more, but that a

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man so well trained to his own profession must always hold his own.

As for Marcella, she said little or nothing. But Wharton, in the dark of the carriage, had a strange sense that her eye was often on him, that her mood marched with his, and that if he could have spoken her response would have been electric.

When he had helped her out of the carriage, and they stood in the vestibule — Mrs. Boyce having walked on into the hall — he said to her, his voice hoarse with fatigue:

"Did I do your bidding, did I rouse them?"

Marcella was seized with sudden shyness.

"You rated them enough."

"Well, did you disapprove?"

"Oh, no! it seems to be your way."

"My proof of friendship? Well, can there be a greater? Will you show me some to-morrow?"

"How can I?"

"Will you criticise? — tell me where you thought I was a fool to-night, or a hypocrite? Your mother would."

"I dare say!" said Marcella, her breath quickening; "but don't expect it from me."

"Why?"

"Because — because I don't pretend. I don't know whether you roused them, but you roused *me*."

She swept on before him into the dark hall, without giving him a moment for reply, took her candle, and disappeared.

Wharton found his own staircase, and went up to bed. The light he carried showed his smiling eyes bent on the ground, his mouth still moving as though with some pleasant desire of speech.

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CHAPTER VII.

WHARTON was sitting alone in the big Mellor drawing-room, after dinner. He had drawn one of the few easy chairs the room possessed to the fire, and with his feet on the fender, and one of Mr. Boyce's French novels on his knee, he was intensely enjoying a moment of physical ease. The work of these weeks of canvassing and speaking had been arduous, and he was naturally indolent. Now, beside this fire and at a distance, it amazed him that any motive whatever, public or private, should ever have been strong enough to take him out through the mire on these winter nights to spout himself hoarse to a parcel of rustics. "What did I do it for?" he asked himself; "what am I going to do it for again to-morrow?"

Ten o'clock. Mr. Boyce was gone to bed. No more entertaining of *him* to be done; one might be thankful for that mercy. Miss Boyce and her mother would, he supposed, be down directly. They had gone up to dress at nine. It was the night of the Maxwell Court ball, and the carriage had been ordered for half-past ten. In a few minutes he would see Miss Boyce in her new dress, wearing Raeburn's pearls. He was extraordinarily observant, and a number of little incidents and domestic arrangements bearing on the feminine side of Marcella's life had been apparent

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to him from the beginning. He knew, for instance, that the trousseau was being made at home, and that during the last few weeks the lady for whom it was destined had shown an indifference to the progress of it which seemed to excite a dumb annoyance in her mother. Curious woman, Mrs. Boyce!

He found himself listening to every opening door, and already, as it were, gazing at Marcella in her white array. He was not asked to this ball. As he had early explained to Miss Boyce, he and Miss Raeburn had been "cuts" for years, for what reason he had of course left Marcella to guess. As if Marcella found any difficulty in guessing — as if the preposterous bigotries and intolerances of the Ladies' League were not enough to account for any similar behaviour on the part of any similar high-bred spinster! As for this occasion, she was far too proud both on her own behalf and Wharton's to say anything either to Lord Maxwell or his sister on the subject of an invitation for her father's guest.

It so happened, however, that Wharton was aware of certain other reasons for his social exclusion from Maxwell Court. There was no necessity, of course, for enlightening Miss Boyce on the point. But as he sat waiting for her, Wharton's mind went back to the past connected with those reasons. In that past Raeburn had had the whip-hand of him; Raeburn had been the moral superior dictating indignant terms to a young fellow detected in flagrant misconduct. Wharton did not know that he bore him any particular grudge. But he had never liked Aldous, as a boy, that he could remember; naturally he had liked him

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less since that old affair. The remembrance of it had made his position at Mellor particularly sweet to him from the beginning; he was not sure that it had not determined his original acceptance of the offer made to him by the Liberal Committee to contest old Dodgson's seat. And during the past few weeks the exhilaration and interest of the general position — considering all things — had been very great. Not only was he on the point of ousting the Maxwell candidate from a seat which he had held securely for years — Wharton was perfectly well aware by now that he was trespassing on Aldous Raeburn's preserves in ways far more important, and infinitely more irritating! He and Raeburn had not met often at Mellor during these weeks of fight. Each had been too busy. But whenever they had come across each other Wharton had clearly perceived that his presence in the house, his growing intimacy with Marcella Boyce, the free-masonry of opinion between them, the interest she took in his contest, the village friendships they had in common, were all intensely galling to Aldous Raeburn.

The course of events, indeed, had lately produced in Wharton a certain excitement — recklessness even. He had come down into these parts to court "the joy of eventful living" — politically and personally. But the situation had proved to be actually far more poignant and personal than he had expected. This proud, crude, handsome girl — to her certainly it was largely due that the days had flown as they had. He was perfectly, one might almost say gleefully, aware that at the present moment it was he and not Aldous Rae-

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burn who was intellectually her master. His mind flew back at first with amusement, then with a thrill of something else, over their talks and quarrels. He smiled gaily as he recalled her fits of anger with him, her remonstrances, appeals — and then her awkward inevitable submissions when he had crushed her with sarcasm or with facts. Ah! she would go to this ball to-night; Aldous Raeburn would parade her as his possession; but she would go with thoughts, ambitions, ideals, which, as they developed, would make her more and more difficult for a Raeburn to deal with. And in those thoughts and ambitions the man who had been her tormentor, teacher, and companion during six rushing weeks knew well that he already counted for much. He had cherished in her all those "divine discontents" which were already there when he first knew her; taught her to formulate them, given her better reasons for them; so that by now she was a person with a far more defined and stormy will than she had been to begin with. Wharton did not particularly know why he should exult; but he did exult. At any rate, he was prodigiously tickled — entertained — by the whole position.

A step, a rustle outside — he hastily shut his book and listened.

The door opened, and Marcella came in — a white vision against the heavy blue of the walls. With her came, too, a sudden strong scent of flowers, for she carried a marvellous bunch of hot-house roses, Aldous's gift, which had just arrived by special messenger.

Wharton sprang up and placed a chair for her.

"I had begun to believe the ball only existed in my

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own imagination!" he said gaily. "Surely you are very late."

Then he saw that she looked disturbed.

"It was papa," she said, coming to the fire, and looking down into it. "It has been another attack of pain — not serious, mamma says; she is coming down directly. But I wonder why they come, and why he thinks himself so ill — do you know?" she added abruptly, turning to her companion.

Wharton hesitated, taken by surprise. During the past weeks, what with Mr. Boyce's confidence and his own acuteness, he had arrived at a very shrewd notion of what was wrong with his host. But he was not going to enlighten the daughter.

"I should say your father wants a great deal of care — and is nervous about himself," he said quietly. "But he will get the care — and your mother knows the whole state of the case."

"Yes, she knows," said Marcella. "I wish I did."

And a sudden painful expression — of moral worry, remorse — passed across the girl's face. Wharton knew that she had often been impatient of late with her father, and incredulous of his complaints. He thought he understood.

"One can often be of more use to a sick person if one is not too well acquainted with what ails them," he said. "Hope and cheerfulness are everything in a case like your father's. He will do well."

"If he does he won't owe any of it —"

She stopped as impulsively as she had begun. "To me," she meant to have said; then had retreated hastily, before her own sense of something unduly

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intimate and personal. Wharton stood quietly beside her, saying nothing, but receiving and soothing her self-reproach just as surely as though she had put it into words.

"You are crushing your flowers, I think," he said suddenly.

And indeed her roses were dangling against her dress, as if she had forgotten all about them.

She raised them carelessly, but he bent to smell them, and she held them out.

"Summer!" he said, plunging his face into them with a long breath of sensuous enjoyment. "How the year sweeps round in an instant! And all the effect of a little heat and a little money. Will you allow me a philosopher's remark?"

He drew back from her. His quick inquisitive but still respectful eye took in every delightful detail.

"If I don't give you leave, my experience is that you will take it!" she said, half laughing, half resentful, as though she had old aggressions in mind.

"You admit the strength of the temptation? It is very simple, no one could help making it. To be spectator of the *height* of anything — the best, the climax — makes any mortal's pulses run. Beauty, success, happiness, for instance?"

He paused smiling. She leant a thin hand on the mantelpiece and looked away; Aldous's pearls slipped backwards along her white arm.

"Do you suppose to-night will be the height of happiness?" she said at last with a little scorn. "These functions don't present themselves to *me* in such a light."

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Wharton could have laughed out — her pedantry was so young and unconscious. But he restrained himself.

"I shall be with the majority to-night," he said demurely. "I may as well warn you."

Her colour rose. No other man had ever dared to speak to her with this assurance, this cool scrutinising air. She told herself to be indignant; the next moment she *was* indignant, but with herself for remembering conventionalities.

"Tell me one thing," said Wharton, changing his tone wholly. "I know you went down hurriedly to the village before dinner. Was anything wrong?"

"Old Patton is very ill," she said, sighing. "I went to ask after him; he may die any moment. And the Hurds' boy too."

He leant against the mantelpiece, talking to her about both cases with a quick incisive common-sense — not unkind, but without a touch of unnecessary sentiment, still less of the superior person — which represented one of the moods she liked best in him. In speaking of the poor he always took the tone of comradeship, of a plain equality, and the tone was, in fact, genuine.

"Do you know," he said presently, "I did not tell you before, but I am certain that Hurd's wife is afraid of you, that she has a secret from you?"

"From me! how could she? I know every detail of their affairs."

"No matter. I listened to what she said that day in the cottage when I had the boy on my knee. I noticed her face, and I am quite certain. She has a secret, and above all a secret from you."

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Marcella looked disturbed for a moment, then she laughed.

"Oh, no!" she said, with a little superior air. "I assure you I know her better than you."

Wharton said no more.

"Marcella!" called a distant voice from the hall.

The girl gathered up her white skirts and her flowers in haste.

"Good-night!"

"Good-night! I shall hear you come home and wonder how you have sped. One word, if I may! Take your *rôle* and play it. There is nothing subjects dislike so much as to see royalty decline its part."

She laughed, blushed, a little proudly and uncertainly, and went without reply. As she shut the door behind her, a sudden flatness fell upon her. She walked through the dark Stone Parlour outside, seeing still the firmly-knit lightly-made figure — boyish, middle-sized, yet never insignificant — the tumbled waves of fair hair, the eyes so keenly blue, the face with its sharp mocking lines, its powers of sudden charm. Then self-reproach leapt, and possessed her. She quickened her pace, hurrying into the hall, as though from something she was ashamed or afraid of.

In the hall a new sensation awaited her. Her mother, fully dressed, stood waiting by the old billiard-table for her maid, who had gone to fetch her a cloak.

Marcella stopped an instant in surprise and delight, then ran up to her. "Mamma, how *lovely* you look! I haven't seen you like that, not since I was a child. I remember you then once, in a low dress, a white dress, with flowers, coming into the nursery. But that

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black becomes you so well, and Deacon has done your hair beautifully!"

She took her mother's hand and kissed her cheek, touched by an emotion which had many roots. There was infinite relief in this tender natural outlet; she seemed to recover possession of herself.

Mrs. Boyce bore the kiss quietly. Her face was a little pinched and white. But the unusual display Deacon had been allowed to make of her pale golden hair, still long and abundant; the unveiling of the shapely shoulders and neck, little less beautiful than her daughter's; the elegant lines of the velvet dress, all these things had very nobly transformed her. Marcella could not restrain her admiration and delight. Mrs. Boyce winced, and, looking upward to the gallery, which ran round the hall, called Deacon impatiently.

"Only, mamma," said Marcella, discontentedly, "I don't like that little chain round your neck. It is not equal to the rest, not worthy of it."

"I have nothing else, my dear," said Mrs. Boyce, drily. "Now, Deacon, don't be all night!"

Nothing else? Yet, if she shut her eyes, Marcella could perfectly recall the diamonds on the neck and arms of that white figure of her childhood — could see herself as a baby playing with the treasures of her mother's jewel-box.

Nowadays, Mrs. Boyce was very secretive and reserved about her personal possessions. Marcella never went into her room unless she was asked, and would never have thought of treating it or its contents with any freedom.

The mean chain which went so ill with the costly

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hoarded dress — it recalled to Marcella all the inexorable silent miseries of her mother's past life, and all the sordid disadvantages and troubles of her own youth. She followed Mrs. Boyce out to the carriage in silence — once more in a tumult of sore pride and doubtful feeling.

Four weeks to her wedding-day! The words dinned in her ears as they drove along. Yet they sounded strange to her, incredible almost. How much did she know of Aldous, of her life that was to be — above all, how much of herself? She was not happy — had not been happy or at ease for many days. Yet in her restlessness she could think nothing out. Moreover, the chain that galled and curbed her was a chain of character. In spite of her modernness, and the complexity of many of her motives, there was certain inherited simplicities of nature at the bottom of her. In her wild demonic childhood you could always trust Marcie Boyce, if she had given you her word — her schoolfellows knew that. If her passions were half-civilised and southern, her way of understanding the point of honour was curiously English, sober, tenacious. So now. Her sense of bond to Aldous had never been in the least touched by any of her dissatisfactions and revolts. Yet it rushed upon her to-night with amazement, and that in four weeks she was going to marry him! Why? how? — what would it really *mean* for him and for her? It was as though in mid-stream she were trying to pit herself for an instant against the current which had so far carried them all on, to see what it might be like to retrace a step, and could only

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realise with dismay the force and rapidity of the water.

Yet all the time another side of her was well aware that she was at that moment the envy of half a county, that in another ten minutes hundreds of eager and critical eyes would be upon her; and her pride was rising to her part. The little incident of the chain had somehow for the moment made the ball and her place in it more attractive to her.

They had no sooner stepped from their carriage than Aldous, who was waiting in the outer hall, joyously discovered them. Till then he had been walking aimlessly amid the crowd of his own guests, wondering when she would come, how she would like it. This splendid function had been his grandfather's idea; it would never have entered his own head for a moment. Yet he understood his grandfather's wish to present his heir's promised bride in this public ceremonious way to the society of which she would some day be the natural leader. He understood, too, that there was more in the wish than met the ear; that the occasion meant to Lord Maxwell, whether Dick Boyce were there or no, the final condoning of things past and done with, a final throwing of the Maxwell shield over the Boyce weakness, and full adoption of Marcella into her new family.

All this he understood and was grateful for. But how would *she* respond? How would she like it — this parade that was to be made of her — these people that must be introduced to her? He was full of anxieties.

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Yet in many ways his mind had been easier of late. During the last week she had been very gentle and good to him — even Miss Raeburn had been pleased with her. There had been no quoting of Wharton when they met; and he had done his philosopher's best to forget him. He trusted her proudly, intensely; and in four weeks she would be his wife.

"Can you bear it?" he said to her in a laughing whisper as she and her mother emerged from the cloak-room.

"Tell me what do do," she said, flushing. "I will do my best. What a crowd! Must we stay very long?"

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Boyce," cried Lord Maxwell, meeting them on the steps of the inner quadrangular corridor — "Welcome indeed! Let me take you in. Marcella! with Aldous's permission!" he stooped his white head gallantly and kissed her on the cheek — "Remember I am an old man; if I choose to pay you compliments, you will have to put up with them!"

Then he offered Mrs. Boyce his arm, a stately figure in his ribbon and cross of the Bath. A delicate red had risen to that lady's thin cheek in spite of her self-possession. "Poor thing," said Lord Maxwell to himself as he led her along — "poor thing! — how distinguished and charming still! One sees to-night what she was like as a girl."

Aldous and Marcella followed. They had to pass along the great corridor which ran round the quadrangle of the house. The antique marbles which lined it were to-night masked in flowers, and seats covered in red had been fitted in wherever it was possible, and

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were now crowded with dancers "sitting out." From the ball-room ahead came waves of waltz-music; the ancient house was alive with colour and perfume, with the sounds of laughter and talk, lightly fretting, and breaking the swaying rhythms of the band. Beyond the windows of the corridor, which had been left uncurtained because of the beauty of the night, the stiff Tudor garden with its fountains, which filled up the quadrangle, was gaily illuminated under a bright moon; and amid all the varied colour of lamps, drapery, dresses, faces, the antique heads ranged along the walls of the corridor — here Marcus Aurelius, there Trajan, there Seneca — and the marble sarcophagi which broke the line at intervals, stood in cold, whitish relief.

Marcella passed along on Aldous's arm, conscious that people were streaming into the corridor from all the rooms opening upon it, and that every eye was fixed upon her and her mother. "Look, there she is," she heard in an excited girl's voice as they passed Lord Maxwell's library, now abandoned to the crowd like all the rest. "Come, quick! There — I told you she was lovely!"

Every now and then some old friend, man or woman, rose smiling from the seats along the side, and Aldous introduced his bride.

"On her dignity!" said an old hunting squire to his daughter when they had passed. "Shy, no doubt — very natural! But nowadays girls, when they're shy, don't giggle and blush as they used to in *my* young days; they look as if you meant to insult them, and they weren't going to allow it! Oh, very

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handsome — very handsome — of course. But you can see she's advanced — peculiar — or what d'ye call it? — woman's rights, I suppose, and all that kind of thing? Like to see you go in for it, Nettie, eh!"

"She's *awfully* handsome," sighed his pink-cheeked, insignificant little daughter, still craning her neck to look — "very simply dressed too, except for those lovely pearls. She does her hair very oddly, so low down — in those plaits. Nobody does it like that nowadays."

"That's because nobody has such a head," said her brother, a young Hussar lieutenant, beside her, in the tone of connoisseurship. "By George, she's ripping — she's the best-looking girl I've seen for a good long time. But she's a Tartar, I'll swear — looks it, anyway."

"Every one says she has the most extraordinary opinions," said the girl, eagerly. "She'll manage him, don't you think? I'm sure he's very meek and mild."

"Don't know that," said the young man, twisting his moustache with the air of exhaustive information. "Raeburn's a very good fellow — excellent fellow — see him shooting, you know — that kind of thing. I expect he's got a will when he wants it. The mother's handsome, too, and looks a lady. The father's kept out of the way, I see. Rather a blessing for the Raeburns. Can't be pleasant, you know, to get a man like that in the family. Look after your spoons — that kind of thing."

Meanwhile Marcella was standing beside Miss Raeburn, at the head of the long ball-room, and doing

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her best to behave prettily. One after another she bowed to, or shook hands with, half the magnates of the county — the men in pink, the women in the new London dresses, for which this brilliant and long-expected ball had given so welcome an excuse. They knew little or nothing of her, except that she was clearly good-looking, that she was that fellow Dick Boyce's daughter and was reported to be "odd." Some, mostly men, who said their conventional few words to her, felt an amused admiration for the skill and rapidity with which she had captured the *parti* of the county; some, mostly women, were already jealous of her. A few of the older people here and there, both men and women — but after all they shook hands like the rest! — knew perfectly well that the girl must be going through an ordeal, were touched by the signs of thought and storm in the face, and looked back at her with kind eyes.

But of these last Marcella realised nothing. What she was saying to herself was that, if they knew little of her, she knew a great deal of many of them. In their talks over the Stone Parlour fire she and Wharton had gone through most of the properties, large and small, of his division, and indeed of the divisions round, by the help of the knowledge he had gained in his canvass, together with a blue-book — one of the numberless! — recently issued, on the state of the midland labourer. He had abounded in anecdote, sarcasm, reflection, based partly on his own experiences, partly on his endless talks with the working-folk, now in the public-house, now at their own chimney-corner. Marcella, indeed, had a large unsus-

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pected acquaintance with the county before she met it in the flesh. She knew that a great many of these men who came and spoke to her were doing their best according to their lights, that improvements were going on, that times were mending. But there were abuses enough still, and the abuses were far more vividly present to her than the improvements. In general, the people who thronged these splendid rooms were to her merely the incompetent members of a useless class. The nation would do away with them in time! Meanwhile it might at least be asked of them that they should practise their profession of landowning, such as it was, with greater conscience and intelligence — that they should not shirk its opportunities or idle them away. And she could point out those who did both — scandalously, intolerably. Once or twice she thought passionately of Minta Hurd, washing and mending all day, in her damp cottage; or of the Pattons in "the parish house," thankful after sixty years of toil for a hovel where the rain came through the thatch, and where the smoke choked you, unless, with the thermometer below freezing-point, you opened the door to the blast. Why should *these* people have all the gay clothes, the flowers, the jewels, the delicate food — all the delight and all the leisure? And those, nothing! Her soul rose against what she saw as she stood there, going through her part. Wharton's very words, every inflection of his voice was in her ears, playing chorus to the scene.

But when these first introductions, these little empty talks of three or four phrases apiece, and all

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of them alike, were nearly done with, Marcella looked eagerly round for Mary Harden. There she was, sitting quietly against the wall in a remote corner, her plain face all smiles, her little feet dancing under the white muslin frock which she had fashioned for herself with so much pain under Marcella's directions. Miss Raeburn was called away to find an arm-chair for some dowager of importance; Marcella took advantage of the break and of the end of a dance to hurry down the room to Mary. Aldous, who was talking to old Sir Charles Leven, Frank's father, a few steps off, nodded and smiled to her as he saw her move.

"Have you been dancing, Mary?" she said severely.

"I wouldn't for worlds! I never was so much amused in my life. Look at those girls — those sisters — in the huge velvet sleeves, like coloured balloons! — and that old lady in the pink tulle and diamonds. — I do so want to get her her cloak! *And* those Lancers! — I never could have imagined people danced like that. They didn't dance them — they romped them! It wasn't beautiful — was it?"

"Why do you expect an English crowd to do anything beautiful? If we could do it, we should be too ashamed."

"But it *is* beautiful, all the same, you scornful person!" cried Mary, dragging her friend down beside her. "How pretty the girls are! And as for the diamonds, I never saw anything so wonderful. I wish I could have made Charles come!"

"Wouldn't he?"

"No" — she looked a little troubled — "he couldn't

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think it would be quite right. But I don't know — a sight like this takes me off my feet, shakes me up, and does *me* a world of good!"

"You dear, simple thing!" said Marcella, slipping her hand into Mary's as it lay on the bench.

"Oh, you needn't be so superior!" cried Mary, — "not for another year at least. I don't believe you are much more used to it than I am!"

"If you mean," said Marcella, "that I was never at anything so big and splendid as this before, you are quite right."

And she looked round the room with that curious, cold air of personal detachment from all she saw, which had often struck Mary, and to-night made her indignant.

"Then enjoy it!" she said, laughing and frowning at the same time. "That's a much more plain duty for *you* than it was for Charles to stay at home — there! Haven't you been dancing?"

"No, Mr. Raeburn doesn't dance. But he thinks he can get through the next Lancers if I will steer him."

"Then I shall find a seat where I can look at you," said Mary, decidedly. "Ah, there is Mr. Raeburn coming to introduce somebody to you. I knew they wouldn't let you sit here long."

Aldous brought up a young Guardsman, who boldly asked Miss Boyce for the pleasure of a dance. Marcella consented; and off they swept into a room which was only just beginning to fill for the new dance, and where, therefore, for the moment the young grace of both had free play. Marcella had been an indefati-

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gable dancer in the old London days at those students' parties, with their dyed gloves and lemonade suppers, which were running in her head now, as she swayed to the rhythm of this perfect band. The mere delight in movement came back to her; and while they danced, she danced with all her heart. Then in the pauses she would lean against the wall beside her partner, and rack her brain to find a word to say to him. As for anything that *he* said, every word — whether of Ascot, or the last Academy, or the new plays, or the hunting and the elections — sounded to her more vapid than the last.

Meanwhile Aldous stood near Mary Harden and watched the dancing figure. He had never seen her dance before. Mary shyly stole a look at him from time to time.

"Well," he said at last, stooping to his neighbour, "what are you thinking of?"

"I think she is a dream!" said Mary, flushing with the pleasure of being able to say it. They were great friends, he and she, and to-night somehow she was not a bit afraid of him.

Aldous's eye sparkled a moment; then he looked down at her with a kind smile.

"If you suppose I am going to let you sit here all night, you are very much mistaken. Marcella gave me precise instructions. I am going off this moment to find somebody."

"Mr. Raeburn — don't!" cried Mary, catching at him. But he was gone, and she was left in trepidation, imagining the sort of formidable young man who was soon to be presented to her, and shaking at the thought of him.

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When the dance was over Marcella returned to Miss Raeburn, who was standing at the door into the corridor and had beckoned to her. She went through a number of new introductions, and declared to herself that she was doing all she could. Miss Raeburn was not so well satisfied.

"Why can't she smile and chatter like other girls?" thought Aunt Neta, impatiently. "It's her 'ideas,' I suppose. What rubbish! There, now — just see the difference!"

For at the moment Lady Winterbourne came up, and instantly Marcella was all smiles and talk, holding her friend by both hands, clinging to her almost.

"Oh, do come here!" she said, leading her into a corner. "There's such a crowd, and I say all the wrong things. There!" with a sigh of relief. "Now I feel myself protected."

"I mustn't keep you," said Lady Winterbourne, a little taken aback by her effusion. "Everybody is wanting to talk to you."

"Oh, I know! There is Miss Raeburn looking at me severely already. But I must do as I like a little."

"You ought to do as Aldous likes," said Lady Winterbourne, suddenly, in her deepest and most tragic voice. It seemed to her a moment had come for admonition, and she seized it hastily.

Marcella stared at her in surprise. She knew by now that when Lady Winterbourne looked most forbidding she was in reality most shy. But still she was taken aback.

"Why do you say that, I wonder?" she asked, half

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reproachfully. "I have been behaving myself quite nicely — I have indeed; at least, as nicely as I knew how."

Lady Winterbourne's tragic air yielded to a slow smile.

"You look very well, my dear. That white becomes you charmingly; so do the pearls. I don't wonder that Aldous always knows where you are."

Marcella raised her eyes and caught those of Aldous fixed upon her from the other side of the room. She blushed, smiled slightly, and looked away.

"Who is that tall man just gone up to speak to him?" she asked of her companion.

"That is Lord Wandle," said Lady Winterbourne, "and his plain second wife behind him. Edward always scolds me for not admiring him. He says women know nothing at all about men's looks, and that Lord Wandle was the most splendid man of his time. But I always think it an unpleasant face."

"Lord Wandle!" exclaimed Marcella, frowning. "Oh, *please* come with me, dear Lady Winterbourne! I know he is asking Aldous to introduce him, and I won't — no I will *not* — be introduced to him."

And laying hold of her astonished companion, she drew her hastily through a doorway near, walked quickly, still gripping her, through two connected rooms beyond, and finally landed her and herself on a sofa in Lord Maxwell's library, pursued meanwhile through all her hurried course by the curious looks of an observant throng.

"That man! — no, that would really have been *too* much!" said Marcella, using her large feather fan with stormy energy.

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"What *is* the matter with you, my dear?" said Lady Winterbourne in her amazement; "and what is the matter with Lord Wandle?"

"You must know!" said Marcella, indignantly. "Oh, you *must* have seen that case in the paper last week — that *shocking* case! A woman and two children died in one of his cottages of blood-poisoning — nothing in the world but his neglect — his *brutal* neglect!" Her breast heaved; she seemed almost on the point of weeping. "The agent was appealed to — did nothing. Then the clergyman wrote to him direct, and got an answer. The answer was published. For cruel insolence I never saw anything like it! He ought to be in prison for manslaughter — and he comes *here!* And people laugh and talk with him!"

She stopped, almost choked by her own passion. But the incident, after all, was only the spark to the mine.

Lady Winterbourne stared at her helplessly.

"Perhaps it isn't true," she suggested. "The newspapers put in so many lies, especially about *us* — the landlords. Edward says one ought never to believe them. Ah, here comes Aldous."

Aldous, indeed, with some perplexity on his brow, was to be seen approaching, looking for his betrothed. Marcella dropped her fan and sat erect, her angry colour fading into whiteness.

"My darling! I couldn't think what had become of you. May I bring Lord Wandle and introduce him to you? He is an old friend here, and my godfather. Not that I am particularly proud of the relationship,"

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he said, dropping his voice as he stooped over her. "He is a soured, disagreeable fellow, and I hate many of the things he does. But it is an old tie, and my grandfather is tender of such things. Only a word or two; then I will get rid of him."

"Aldous, I *can't*," said Marcella, looking up at him. "How could I? I saw that case. I must be rude to him."

Aldous looked considerably disturbed.

"It was very bad," he said slowly. "I didn't know you had seen it. What shall I do? I promised to go back for him."

"Lord Wandle — Miss Boyce!" said Miss Raeburn's sharp little voice behind Aldous. Aldous, moving aside in hasty dismay, saw his aunt, looking very determined, presenting her tall neighbour, who bowed with old-fashioned deference to the girl on the sofa.

Lady Winterbourne looked with trepidation at Marcella. But the social instinct held, to some extent. Ninety-nine women can threaten a scene of the kind Lady Winterbourne dreaded, for one that can carry it through. Marcella wavered; then, with her most forbidding air, she made a scarcely perceptible return of Lord Wandle's bow.

"Did you escape in here out of the heat?" he asked her. "But I am afraid no one lets you escape to-night. The occasion is too interesting."

Marcella made no reply. Lady Winterbourne threw in a nervous remark on the crowd.

"Oh, yes, a great crush," said Lord Wandle. "Of course, we all come to see Aldous happy. How long is it, Miss Boyce, since you settled at Mellor?"

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"Six months."

She looked straight before her and not at him as she answered, and her tone made Miss Raeburn's blood boil.

Lord Wandle — a battered, coarsened, but still magnificent-looking man of sixty — examined the speaker an instant from half-shut eyes, then put up his hand to his moustache with a half-smile.

"You like the country?"

"Yes."

As she spoke her reluctant monosyllable, the girl had really no conception of the degree of hostility expressed in her manner. Instead she was hating herself for her own pusillanimity.

"And the people?"

"Some of them."

And straightway she raised her fierce black eyes to his, and the man before her understood, as plainly as any one need understand, that, whoever else Miss Boyce might like, she did not like Lord Wandle, and wished for no more conversation with him.

Her interrogator turned to Aldous with smiling *aplomb*.

"Thank you, my dear Aldous. Now let me retire. No one must *monopolise* your charming lady."

And again he bowed low to her, this time with an ironical emphasis not to be mistaken, and walked away.

Lady Winterbourne saw him go up to his wife, who had followed him at a distance, and speak to her roughly with a frown. They left the room, and presently, through the other door of the library which

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opened on the corridor, she saw them pass, as though they were going to their carriage.

Marcella rose. She looked first at Miss Raeburn — then at Aldous.

"Will you take me away?" she said, going up to him; "I am tired — take me to your room."

He put her hand inside his arm, and they pushed their way through the crowd. Outside in the passage they met Hallin. He had not seen her before, and he put out his hand. But there was something distant in his gentle greeting which struck at this moment like a bruise on Marcella's quivering nerves. It came across her that for some time past he had made no further advances to her; that his first eager talk of friendship between himself and her had dropped; that his *acceptance* of her into his world and Aldous's was somehow suspended — in abeyance. She bit her lip tightly and hurried Aldous along. Again the same lines of gay, chatting people along the corridor, and on either side of the wide staircase — greetings, introduction — a nightmare of publicity.

"Rather pronounced — to carry him off like that," said a clergyman to his wife with a kindly smile, as the two tall figures disappeared along the upper gallery. "She will have him all to herself before long."

Aldous shut the door of his sitting-room behind them. Marcella quickly drew her hand out of his arm, and going forward to the mantelpiece rested both elbows upon it and hid her face.

He looked at her a moment in distress and astonishment, standing a little apart. Then he saw that she

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was crying. The colour flooded into his face, and going up to her he took her hand, which was all she would yield him, and, holding it to his lips, said in her ear every soothing tender word that love's tutoring could bring to mind. In his emotion he told himself and her that he admired and loved her the more for the incident downstairs, for the temper she had shown! She alone among them all had had the courage to strike the true stern Christian note. As to the annoyance such courage might bring upon him and her in the future — even as to the trouble it might cause his own dear folk — what real matter? In these things she should lead.

What could love have asked better than such a moment? Yet Marcella's weeping was in truth the weeping of despair. This man's very sweetness to her, his very assumption of the right to comfort and approve her, roused in her a desperate stifled sense of bonds that should never have been made, and that now could not be broken. It was all plain to her at last. His touch had no thrill for her; his frown no terror. She had accepted him without loving him, coveting what he could give her. And now it seemed to her that she cared nothing for anything he could give! — that the life before her was to be one series of petty conflicts between her and a surrounding circumstance which must inevitably in the end be too strong for her, conflicts from which neither heart nor ambition could gain anything. She had desired a great position for what she might do with it. But what could she do with it! She would be subdued — oh! very quickly! — to great houses and great people,

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and all the vapid pomp and idle toil of wealth. All that picture of herself, stooping from place and power, to bind up the wounds of the people, in which she had once delighted, was to her now a mere flimsy vulgarity. She had been shown other ideals — other ways — and her pulses were still swaying under the audacity — the virile inventive force of the showman. Everything she had once desired looked flat to her; everything she was not to have, glowed and shone. Poverty, adventure, passion, the joys of self-realisation — these she gave up. She would become Lady Maxwell, make friends with Miss Raeburn, and wear the family diamonds!

Then, in the midst of her rage with herself and fate, she drew herself away, looked up, and caught full the eyes of Aldous Raeburn. Conscience stung and burned. What was this life she had dared to trifle with — this man she had dared to treat as a mere pawn in her own game? She gave way utterly, appalled at her own misdoing, and behaved like a penitent child. Aldous, astonished and alarmed by her emotions and by the wild incoherent things she said, won his way at last to some moments of divine happiness, when, leaving her trembling hand in his, she sat submissively beside him, gradually quieting down, summoning back her smiles and her beauty, and letting him call her all the fond names he would.

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CHAPTER VIII.

SCARCELY a word was exchanged between Marcella and her mother on the drive home. Yet under ordinary circumstances Marcella's imagination would have found some painful exercise in the effort to find out in what spirit her mother had taken the evening — the first social festivity in which Richard Boyce's wife had taken part for sixteen years. In fact, Mrs. Boyce had gone through it very quietly. After her first public entry on Lord Maxwell's arm she had sat in her corner, taking keen note of everything, enjoying probably the humours of her kind. Several old acquaintances who had seen her at Mellor as a young wife in her first married years had come up with some trepidation to speak to her. She had received them with her usual well-bred indifference, and they had gone away under the impression that she regarded herself as restored to society by this great match that her daughter was making. Lady Winterbourne had been shyly and therefore formidably kind to her; and both Lord Maxwell and Miss Raeburn had been genuinely interested in smoothing the effort to her as much as they could. She meanwhile watched Marcella — except through the encounter with Lord Wandle, which she did not see — and found some real pleasure in talking both to Aldous and to Hallin.

Yet all through she was preoccupied, and towards

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the end very anxious to get home, a state of mind which prevented her from noticing Marcella's changed looks after her reappearance with Aldous in the ball-room, as closely as she otherwise might have done. Yet the mother *had* observed that the end of Marcella's progress had been somewhat different from the beginning; that the girl's greetings had been gentler, her smiles softer; and that in particular she had taken some pains, some wistful pains, to make Hallin talk to her. Lord Maxwell — ignorant of the Wandle incident — was charmed with her, and openly said so, both to the mother and Lady Winterbourne, in his hearty old man's way. Only Miss Raeburn held indignantly aloof, and would not pretend, even to Mrs. Boyce.

And now Marcella was tired — dead tired, she said to herself, both in mind and body. She lay back in the carriage, trying to sink herself in her own fatigue, to forget everything, to think of nothing. Outside the night was mild, and the moon clear. For some days past, after the break up of the long frost, there had been heavy rain. Now the rain had cleared away, and in the air there was already an early promise of spring. As she walked home from the village that afternoon she had felt the buds and the fields stirring.

When they got home, Mrs. Boyce turned to her daughter at the head of the stairs, "Shall I unlace your dress, Marcella?"

"Oh no, thank you. Can I help you?"

"No. Good-night."

"Mamma!" Marcella turned and ran after her.

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"I should like to know how papa is. I will wait here if you will tell me."

Mrs. Boyce looked surprised. Then she went into her room and shut the door. Marcella waited outside, leaning against the old oak gallery which ran round the hall, her candle the one spot of light and life in the great dark house.

"He seems to have slept well," said Mrs. Boyce, reappearing, and speaking under her breath. "He has not taken the opiate I left for him, so he cannot have been in pain. Good-night."

Marcella kissed her and went. Somehow, in her depression of nerve and will, she was loth to go away by herself. The loneliness of the night, and of her wing of the house, weighed upon her; the noises made by the old boards under her steps, the rustling draughts from the dark passages to right and left startled and troubled her; she found herself childishly fearing lest her candle should go out.

Yet, as she descended the two steps to the passage outside her door, she could have felt little practical need of it, for the moonlight was streaming in through its uncovered windows, not directly, but reflected from the Tudor front of the house which ran at right angles to this passage, and was to-night a shining silver palace, every battlement, window, and moulding in sharpest light and shade under the radiance of the night. Beneath her feet, as she looked out into the Cedar Garden, was a deep triangle of shadow, thrown by that part of the building in which she stood; and beyond the garden the barred black masses of the cedars closing up the view lent additional magic

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to the glittering unsubstantial fabric of the moonlit house, which was, as it were, embosomed and framed among them. She paused a moment, struck by the strangeness and beauty of the spectacle. The Tudor front had the air of some fairy banqueting-hall lit by unearthly hands for some weird gathering of ghostly knights. Then she turned to her room, impatiently longing in her sick fatigue to be quit of her dress and ornaments and tumble into sleep.

Yet she made no hurry. She fell on the first chair that offered. Her candle behind her had little power over the glooms of the dark tapestried room, but it did serve to illuminate the lines of her own form, as she saw it reflected in the big glass of her wardrobe, straight in front of her. She sat with her hands round her knees, absently looking at herself, a white long-limbed apparition struck out of the darkness. But she was conscious of nothing save one mounting overwhelming passionate desire, almost a cry.

Mr. Wharton must go away — he *must* — or she could not bear it.

Quick alternations of insight, memory, self-recognition, self-surrender, rose and broke upon her. At last, physical weariness recalled her. She put up her hands to take off her pearls.

As she did so, she started, hearing a noise that made her turn her head. Just outside her door a little spiral staircase led down from her corridor to the one below, which ran at the back of the old library, and opened into the Cedar Garden at its further end.

Steps surely — light steps — along the corridor outside, and on the staircase. Nor did they die

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away. She could still hear them,— as she sat, arrested, straining her ears,— pacing slowly along the lower passage.

Her heart, after its pause, leapt into fluttering life. This room of hers, the two passages, the library, and the staircase, represented that part of the house to which the ghost stories of Mellor clung most persistently. Substantially the block of building was of early Tudor date, but the passages and the staircase had been alterations made with some clumsiness at the time of the erection of the eighteenth-century front, with a view to bringing these older rooms into the general plan. Marcella, however, might demonstrate as she pleased that the Boyce who was supposed to have stabbed himself on the staircase died at least forty years before the staircase was made. None the less, no servant would go alone, if she could help it, into either passage after dark; and there was much excited marvelling how Miss Boyce could sleep where she did. Deacon abounded in stories of things spiritual and peripatetic, of steps, groans, lights in the library, and the rest. Marcella had consistently laughed at her.

Yet all the same she had made in secret a very diligent pursuit of this ghost, settling in the end to a certain pique with him that he would not show himself to so ardent a daughter of the house. She had sat up waiting for him; she had lingered in the corridor outside, and on the stairs, expecting him. By the help of a favourite carpenter she had made researches into roofs, water-pipes, panelling, and old cupboards, in the hope of finding a practical clue to him. In vain.

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Yet here were the steps — regular, soft, unmistakable. The colour rushed back into her cheeks! Her eager healthy youth forgot its woes, flung off its weariness, and panted for an adventure, a discovery. Springing up, she threw her fur wrap round her again, and gently opened the door, listening.

For a minute, nothing — then a few vague sounds as of something living and moving down below — surely in the library? Then the steps again. Impossible that it should be any one breaking in. No burglar would walk so leisurely. She closed her door behind her, and, gathering her white satin skirts about her, she descended the staircase.

The corridor below was in radiant moonlight, chequered by the few pieces of old furniture it contained, and the black and white of the old portrait prints hanging on the walls. At first her seeking, excited eyes could make out nothing. Then in a flash they perceived the figure of Wharton at the further end near the garden door, leaning against one of the windows. He was apparently looking out at the moonlit house, and she caught the faint odour of a cigarette.

Her first instinct was to turn and fly. But Wharton had seen her. As he looked about him at the sound of her approach, the moon, which was just rounding the corner of the house, struck on her full, amid the shadows of the staircase, and she heard his exclamation.

Dignity — a natural pride — made her pause. She came forward slowly — he eagerly.

"I heard footsteps," she said, with a coldness

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under which he plainly saw her embarrassment. "I could not suppose that anybody was still up, so I came down to see."

He was silent a moment, scanning her with laughing eyes. Then he shook his head. "Confess you took me for the ghost?" he said.

She hesitated; then must laugh too. She herself had told him the stories, so that his guess was natural.

"Perhaps I did," she said. "One more disappointment! Good-night."

He looked after her a quick undecided moment as she made a step in front of him, then at the half-burnt cigarette he held in his hand, threw the end away with a hasty gesture, overtook her and walked beside her along the corridor.

"I heard you and your mother come in," he said, as though explaining himself. "Then I waited till I thought you must both be asleep, and came down here to look at that wonderful effect on the old house." He pointed to the silver palace outside. "I have a trick of being sleepless — a trick, too, of wandering at night. My own people know it, and bear with me, but I am abashed that you should have found me out. Just tell me — in one word — how the ball went?"

He paused at the foot of the stairs, his hands on his sides, as keenly wide-awake as though it were three o'clock in the afternoon instead of three in the morning.

Womanlike, her mood instantly shaped itself to his.

"It went very well," she said perversely, putting her satin-slippered foot on the first step. "There were six hundred people upstairs, and four hundred

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coachmen and footmen downstairs, according to our man. Everybody said it was splendid."

His piercing enigmatic gaze could not leave her. As he had often frankly warned her, he was a man in quest of sensations. Certainly, in this strange meeting with Aldous Raeburn's betrothed, in the midst of the sleep-bound house, he had found one. Her eyes were heavy, her cheek pale. But in this soft vague light — white arms and neck now hidden, now revealed by the cloak she had thrown about her glistening satin — she was more enchanting than he had ever seen her. His breath quickened.

He said to himself that he would make Miss Boyce stay and talk to him. What harm — to her or to Raeburn? Raeburn would have chances enough before long. Why admit his monopoly before the time? She was not in love with him! As to Mrs. Grundy — absurd! What in the true reasonableness of things was to prevent human beings from conversing by night as well as by day?

"One moment" — he said, delaying her. "You must be dead tired — too tired for romance. Else I should say to you, turn aside an instant and look at the library. It is a sight to remember."

Inevitably she glanced behind her, and saw that the library door was ajar. He flung it open, and the great room showed wide, its high domed roof lost in shadow, while along the bare floor and up the latticed books crept, here streaks and fingers, and there wide breadths of light from the unshuttered and curtainless windows.

"Isn't it the very poetry of night and solitude?"

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he said, looking in with her. "You love the place; but did you ever see it so lovable? The dead are here; you did right to come and seek them! Look at your namesake, in that ray. To-night she lives! She knows that is her husband opposite — those are her books beside her. And the rebel!" — he pointed smiling to the portrait of John Boyce. "When you are gone I shall shut myself up here — sit in his chair, invoke him — and put my speech together. I am nervous about to-morrow" (he was bound, as she knew, to a large Labour Congress in the Midlands, where he was to preside), "and sleep will make no terms with me. Ah! — how strange! Who can that be passing the avenue?"

He made a step or two into the room, and put up his hand to his brow, looking intently. Involuntarily, yet with a thrill, Marcella followed. They walked to the window.

"It is *Hurd!*" she cried in a tone of distress, pressing her face against the glass. "Out at this time, and with a gun! Oh, dear, dear!"

There could be no question that it was Hurd. Wharton had seen him linger in the shadowy edge of the avenue, as though reconnoitring, and now, as he stealthily crossed the moonlit grass, his slouching dwarf's figure, his large head, and the short gun under his arm, were all plainly visible.

"What do you suppose he is after?" said Wharton, still gazing, his hands in his pockets.

"I don't know; he wouldn't poach on *our* land; I'm sure he wouldn't! Besides, there is nothing to poach." — Wharton smiled. — "He must be going,

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after all, to Lord Maxwell's coverts! They are just beyond the avenue, on the side of the hill. Oh! it is too disappointing! Can we do anything?"

She looked at her companion with troubled eyes. This incursion of something sadly and humanly real seemed suddenly to have made it natural to be standing beside him there at that strange hour. Her conscience was soothed.

Wharton shook his head.

"I don't see what we could do. How strong the instinct is! I told you that woman had a secret. Well, it is only one form — the squalid peasant's form — of the same instinct which sends the young fellows of our class ruffling it and chancing it all over the world. It is the instinct to take one's fling, to get out of the rut, to claim one's innings against the powers that be — Nature, or the law, or convention."

"I know all that — I never blame them!" — cried Marcella — "but just now it is so monstrous — so dangerous! Westall specially alert — and this gang about! Besides, I got him work from Lord Maxwell, and made him promise me — for the wife and children's sake."

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"I should think Westall is right, and that the gang have got hold of him. It is what always happens. The local man is the catspaw. — So you are sorry for him — this man?" he said in another tone, facing round upon her.

She looked astonished, and drew herself up nervously, turning at the same time to leave the room. But before she could reply he hurried on:

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"He — may escape his risk. Give your pity, Miss Boyce, rather to one — who has not escaped!"

"I don't know what you mean," she said, unconsciously laying a hand on one of the old chairs beside her to steady herself. "But it is too late to talk. Good-night, Mr. Wharton."

"Good-bye," he said quietly, yet with a low emphasis, at the same time moving out of her path. She stopped, hesitating. Beneath the lace and faded flowers on her breast he could see how her heart beat.

"Not good-bye? You are coming back after the meeting?"

"I think not. I must not inflict myself — on Mrs. Boyce — any more. You will all be very busy during the next three weeks. It would be an intrusion if I were to come back at such a time — especially — considering the fact" — he spoke slowly — "that I am as distasteful as I now know myself to be, to your future husband. Since you all left to-night the house has been very quiet. I sat over the fire thinking. It grew clear to me. I must go, and go at once. Besides — a lonely man as I am must not risk his nerve. His task is set him, and there are none to stand by him if he fails."

She trembled all over. Weariness and excitement made normal self-control almost impossible.

"Well, then, I must say thank you," she said indistinctly, "for you have taught me a great deal."

"You will unlearn it!" he said gaily, recovering his self-possession, so it seemed, as she lost hers. "Besides, before many weeks are over you will have heard hard things of me. I know that very well. I

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can say nothing to meet them. Nor should I attempt anything. It may sound brazen, but that past of mine, which I can see perpetually present in Aldous Raeburn's mind, for instance, and which means so much to his good aunt, means to me just nothing at all! The doctrine of identity must be true — I must be the same person I was then. But, all the same, what I did then does not matter a straw to me now. To all practical purposes I am another man. I was then a youth, idle, *désœuvré*, playing with all the keys of life in turn. I have now unlocked the path that suits me. Its quest has transformed me — as I believe, ennobled me. I do not ask Raeburn or any one else to believe it. It is my own affair. Only, if we ever meet again in life, you and I, and you think you have reason to ask humiliation of me, do not ask it, do not expect it. The man you will have in your mind has nothing to do with me. I will not be answerable for his sins."

As he said these things he was leaning lightly forward, looking up at her, his arms resting on the back of one of the old chairs, one foot crossed over the other. The attitude was easy calm itself. The tone — indomitable, analytic, reflective — matched it. Yet, all the same, her woman's instinct divined a hidden agitation, and, woman-like, responded to that and that only.

"Mr. Raeburn will never tell me old stories about anybody," she said proudly. "I asked him once, out — out of curiosity — about you, and he would tell me nothing."

"Generous!" said Wharton, drily. "I am grateful."

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"No!" cried Marcella, indignantly, rushing blindly at the outlet for emotion. "No! — you are not grateful; you are always judging him harshly — criticising, despising what he does."

Wharton was silent a moment. Even in the moonlight she could see the reddening of his cheek.

"So be it," he said at last. "I submit. You must know best. But you? are you always content? Does this *milieu* into which you are passing always satisfy you? To-night, did your royalty please you? will it soon be enough for you?"

"You know it is not enough," she broke out, hotly; "it is insulting that you should ask in that tone. It means that you think me a hypocrite! — and I have given you no cause — "

"Good heavens, no!" he exclaimed, interrupting her, and speaking in a low, hurried voice. "I had no motive, no reason for what I said — none — but this, that you are going — that we are parting. I spoke in gibes to make you speak — somehow to strike — to reach you. To-morrow it will be too late!"

And before, almost, she knew that he had moved, he had stooped forward, caught a fold of her dress, pressed it to his lips, and dropped it.

"Don't speak," he said brokenly, springing up, and standing before her in her path. "You shall forgive me — I will compel it! See! here we are on this moonlit space of floor, alone, in the night. Very probably we shall never meet again, except as strangers. Put off convention, and speak to me, soul to soul! You are not happy altogether in this marriage. I know it. You have as good as confessed it. Yet

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you will go through with it. You have given your word — your honour holds you. I recognise that it holds you. I say nothing, not a syllable, against your bond! But here, to-night, tell me, promise me that you will make this marriage of yours serve *our* hopes and ends, the ends that you and I have foreseen together — that it shall be your instrument, not your chain. We have been six weeks together. You say you have learnt from me; you have! you have given me your mind, your heart to write on, and I have written. Henceforward you will never look at life as you might have done if I had not been here. Do you think I triumph, that I boast? Ah!" he drew in his breath — "What if in helping you, and teaching you — for I have helped and taught you! — I have undone myself? What if I came here the slave of impersonal causes, of ends not my own? What if I leave — maimed — in face of the battle? Not your fault? No, perhaps not! but, at least, you owe me some gentleness now, in these last words — some kindness in farewell."

He came closer, held out his hands. With one of her own she put his back, and lifted the other dizzily to her forehead.

"Don't come near me!" she said, tottering. "What is it? I cannot see. Go!"

And guiding herself, as though blindfold, to a chair, she sank upon it, and her head dropped. It was the natural result of a moment of intense excitement coming upon nerves already strained and tried to their utmost. She fought desperately against her weakness; but there was a moment when all around her swam, and she knew nothing.

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Then came a strange awakening. What was this room, this weird light, these unfamiliar forms of things, this warm support against which her cheek lay? She opened her eyes languidly. They met Wharton's half in wonder. He was kneeling beside her, holding her. But for an instant she realised nothing except his look, to which her own helplessly replied.

"Once!" she heard him whisper. "Once! Then nothing more — for ever."

And stooping, slowly, deliberately, he kissed her.

In a stinging flow, life, shame, returned upon her. She struggled to her feet, pushing him from her.

"You dared," she said, "*dared* such a thing!"

She could say no more; but her attitude, fiercely instinct, through all her physical weakness, with her roused best self, was speech enough. He did not venture to approach her. She walked away. He heard the door close, hurrying steps on the little stairs, then silence.

He remained where she had left him, leaning against the latticed wall for some time. When he moved it was to pick up a piece of maidenhair which had dropped from her dress.

"That was a scene!" he said, looking at it, and at the trembling of his own hand. "It carries one back to the days of the Romantics. Was I Alfred de Musset? — and she George Sand? Did any of them ever taste a more poignant moment than I — when she — lay upon my breast? To be helpless — yet yield nothing — it challenged me! Yet I took no advantage — none. When she *looked* — when her eye, her *soul*,

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was, for that instant, mine, then! — Well! — the world has rushed with me since I saw her on the stairs; life can bring me nothing of such a quality again. What did I say? — how much did I mean? My God! how can I tell? I began as an actor, did I finish as a man?"

He paced up and down, thinking; gradually, by the help of an iron will quieting down each rebellious pulse.

"That poacher fellow did me a good turn. *Dare!* the word galled. But, after all, what woman could say less? And what matter? I have held her in my arms, in a setting — under a moon — worthy of her. Is not life enriched thereby beyond robbery? And what harm? Raeburn is not injured. *She* will never tell — and neither of us will ever forget. Ah! — what was that?"

He walked quickly to the window. What he had heard had been a dull report coming apparently from the woods beyond the eastern side of the avenue. As he reached the window it was followed by a second.

"That poacher's gun? — no doubt!" — he strained his eyes in vain — "Collision perhaps — and mischief? No matter! I have nothing to do with it. The world is all lyric for me to-night. I can hear in it no other rhythm."

The night passed away. When the winter morning broke, Marcella was lying with wide sleepless eyes, waiting and pining for it. Her candle still burnt beside her; she had had no courage for darkness, nor the smallest desire for sleep. She had gone through

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shame and anguish. But she would have scorned to pity herself. Was it not her natural, inevitable portion?

"I will tell Aldous everything — *everything*," she said to herself for the hundredth time, as the light penetrated. "Was *that* only seven striking — *seven* — impossible!"

She sat up haggard and restless, hardly able to bear the thought of the hours that must pass before she could see Aldous — put all to the touch.

Suddenly she remembered Hurd — then old Patton.

"He was dying last night," she thought, in her moral torment — her passion to get away from herself. "Is he gone? This is the hour when old people die — the dawn. I will go and see — go at once."

She sprang up. To baffle this ache within her by some act of repentance, of social amends, however small, however futile — to propitiate herself, if but by a hairbreadth — this, no doubt, was the instinct at work. She dressed hastily, glad of the cold, glad of the effort she had to make against the stiffness of her own young bones — glad of her hunger and faintness, of everything physically hard that had to be fought and conquered.

In a very short time she had passed quietly downstairs and through the hall, greatly to the amazement of William, who opened the front door for her. Once in the village road the damp raw air revived her greatly. She lifted her hot temples to it, welcoming the waves of wet mist that swept along the road, feeling her youth come back to her.

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Suddenly as she was nearing the end of a narrow bit of lane between high hedges, and the first houses of the village were in sight, she was stopped by a noise behind her — a strange unaccountable noise as of women's voices, calling and wailing. It startled and frightened her, and she stood in the middle of the road waiting.

Then she saw coming towards her two women running at full speed, crying and shouting, their aprons up to their faces.

"What is it? What is the matter?" she asked, going to meet them, and recognising two labourers' wives she knew.

"Oh! miss — oh! miss!" said the foremost, too wrapt up in her news to be surprised at the sight of her. "They've just found him — they're bringin' ov 'im home; they've got a shutter from Muster Wellin! 'im at Disley Farm. It wor close by Disley wood they found 'em. And there's one ov 'is men they've sent off ridin' for the inspector — here he come, miss! Come out o' th' way!"

They dragged her back, and a young labourer galloped past them on a farm colt, urging it on to its full pace, his face red and set.

"Who is found?" cried Marcella — "What is it?"

"Westall, miss — Lor' bless you — Shot him in the head they did — blowed his brains right out — and Charlie Dynes — oh! he's knocked about shamful — the doctor don't give no hopes of him. Oh deary — deary me! And we're goin' for Muster Harden — ee must tell the widder — or Miss Mary — none on us can!"

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"And who did it?" said Marcella, pale with horror, holding her.

"Why the poachers, miss. Them as they've bin waitin' for all along — and they do say as Jim Hurd 's in it. Oh Lord, oh Lord!"

Marcella stood petrified, and let them hurry on.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE lane was still again, save for the unwonted sounds coming from the groups which had gathered round the two women, and were now moving beside them along the village street a hundred yards ahead.

Marcella stood in a horror of memory — seeing Hurd's figure cross the moonlit avenue from dark to dark. Where was he? Had he escaped? Suddenly she set off running, stung by the thought of what might have already happened under the eyes of that unhappy wife, those wretched children.

As she entered the village, a young fellow ran up to her in breathless excitement. "They've got 'im, miss. He'd come straight home — 'adn't made no attempt to run. As soon as Jenkins" (Jenkins was the policeman) "heared of it, ee went straight across to 'is house, an' caught 'im. Ee wor goin' to make off — 'is wife 'ad been persuadin' ov 'im all night. But they've got him, miss, sure enough!"

The lad's exultation was horrible. Marcella waved him aside and ran on. A man on horseback appeared on the road in front of her leading from Widrington to the village. She recognised Aldous Raeburn, who had checked his horse in sudden amazement as he saw her talking to the boy.

"My darling! what are you here for? Oh! go

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home — go *home!* — out of this horrible business. They have sent for me as a magistrate. Dynes is alive — I *beg* you! — go home!"

She shook her head, out of breath and speechless with running. At the same moment she and he, looking to the right, caught sight of the crowd standing in front of Hurd's cottage.

A man ran out from it, seeing the horse and its rider.

"Muster Raeburn! Muster Raeburn! They've cotched 'im; Jenkins has got 'im."

"Ah!" said Aldous, drawing a long, stern breath; "he didn't try to get off then? Marcella! — you are not going there — to that house!"

He spoke in a tone of the strongest remonstrance. Her soul rose in anger against it.

"I am going to *her*," she said panting; — "don't wait."

And she left him and hurried on.

As soon as the crowd round the cottage saw her coming, they divided to let her pass.

"She's quiet now, miss," said a woman to her significantly, nodding towards the hovel. "Just after Jenkins got in you could hear her crying out pitiful."

"That was when they wor a-handcuffin' him," said a man beside her.

Marcella shuddered.

"Will they let me in?" she asked.

"They won't let none ov *us* in," said the man. "There's Hurd's sister," and he pointed to a weeping woman supported by two others. "They've kep' her out. But here's the inspector, miss; you ask him."

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The inspector, a shrewd officer of long experience, fetched in haste from a mile's distance, galloped up, and gave his horse to a boy.

Marcella went up to him.

He looked at her with sharp interrogation. "You are Miss Boyce? Miss Boyce of Mellor?"

"Yes, I want to go to the wife; I will promise not to get in your way."

He nodded. The crowd let them pass. The inspector knocked at the door, which was cautiously unlocked by Jenkins, and the two went in together.

"She's a queer one," said a thin, weasel-eyed man in the crowd to his neighbour. "To think o' her bein' in it — at this time o' day. You could see Muster Raeburn was a tellin' of her to go 'ome. But she's allus pampered them Hurds."

The speaker was Ned Patton, old Patton's son, and Hurd's companion on many a profitable night-walk. It was barely a week since he had been out with Hurd on another ferreting expedition, some of the proceeds of which were still hidden in Patton's outhouse. But at the present moment he was one of the keenest of the crowd, watching eagerly for the moment when he should see his old comrade come out, trapped and checkmated, bound safely and surely to the gallows. The natural love of incident and change which keeps life healthy had been starved in him by his labourer's condition. This sudden excitement had made a brute of him.

The man next him grimaced, and took his pipe out of his mouth a moment.

"*She* won't be able to do nothin' for 'im! Ther

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isn't a man nor boy in this 'ere place as didn't know as ee hated Westall like pison, and would be as like as not to do for 'im some day. That'll count agen 'im now terrible strong! Ee wor allus one to blab, ee wor."

"Well, an' Westall said jus' as much!" struck in another voice; "theer wor sure to be a fight iv ever Westall got at 'im — on the job. You see — they may bring it in manslarter after all."

"'Ow does any one know ee wor there at all? who seed him?" inquired a white-haired elderly man, raising a loud quavering voice from the middle of the crowd.

"Charlie Dynes seed 'im," cried several together.

"How do yer know ee seed 'im?"

From the babel of voices which followed the white-haired man slowly gathered the beginnings of the matter. Charlie Dynes, Westall's assistant, had been first discovered by a horsekeeper in Farmer Wellin's employment as he was going to his work. The lad had been found under a hedge, bleeding and frightfully injured, but still alive. Close beside him was the dead body of Westall with shot-wounds in the head. On being taken to the farm and given brandy, Dynes was asked if he had recognised anybody. He had said there were five of them, "town chaps"; and then he had named Hurd quite plainly — whether anybody else, nobody knew. It was said he would die, and that Mr. Raeburn had gone to take his deposition.

"An' them town chaps got off, eh?" said the elderly man.

"Clean!" said Patton, refilling his pipe. "Trust them!"

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Meanwhile, inside this poor cottage Marcella was putting out all the powers of the soul. As the door closed behind her and the inspector, she saw Hurd sitting handcuffed in the middle of the kitchen, watched by a man whom Jenkins, the local policeman, had got in to help him, till some more police should arrive. Jenkins was now upstairs searching the bedroom. The little bronchitic boy sat on the fender, in front of the untidy fireless grate, shivering, his emaciated face like a yellowish white mask, his eyes fixed immovably on his father. Every now and then he was shaken with coughing, but still he looked — with the dumb devoted attention of some watching animal.

Hurd, too, was sitting silent. His eyes, which seemed wider open and more brilliant than usual, wandered restlessly from thing to thing about the room; his great earth-stained hands in their fetters twitched every now and then on his knee. Haggard and dirty as he was, there was a certain aloofness, a dignity even, about the misshapen figure which struck Marcella strangely. Both criminal and victim may have it — this dignity. It means that a man feels himself set apart from his kind.

Hurd started at sight of Marcella. "I want to speak to her," he said hoarsely, as the inspector approached him — "to that lady" — nodding towards her.

"Very well," said the inspector; "only it is my duty to warn you that anything you say now will be taken down and used as evidence at the inquest."

Marcella came near. As she stood in front of him, one trembling ungloved hand crossed over the other,

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the diamond in her engagement ring catching the light from the window sparkled brightly, diverting even for the moment the eyes of the little fellow against whom her skirts were brushing.

"Ee might ha' killed me just as well as I killed 'im," said Hurd, bending over to her and speaking with difficulty from the dryness of his mouth. "I didn't mean nothink o' what happened. He and Charlie came on us round Disley Wood. He didn't take no notice o' them. It was they as beat Charlie. But he came straight on at me — all in a fury — a blackguardin' ov me, with his stick up. I thought he was for beatin' my brains out, an' I up with my gun and fired. He was so close — that was how he got it all in the head. But ee might 'a' killed me just as well."

He paused, staring at her with a certain anguished intensity, as though he were watching to see how she took it — nay, trying its effect both on her and himself. He did not look afraid or cast down — nay, there was a curious buoyancy and steadiness about his manner for the moment which astonished her. She could almost have fancied that he was more alive, more of a *man* than she had ever seen him — mind and body better fused, more at command.

"Is there anything more you wish to say to me?" she asked him, after waiting.

Then suddenly his manner changed. Their eyes met. Hers, with all their subtle inheritance of various expression, their realised character, as it were, searched his, tried to understand them — those peasant eyes, so piercing to her strained sense in their animal

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urgency and shame. *Why* had he done this awful thing? — deceived her — wrecked his wife? — that was what her look asked. It seemed to her too *childish* — too *stupid* to be believed.

"I haven't made nobbut a poor return to *you*, miss," he said in a shambling way, as though the words were dragged out of him. Then he threw up his head again. "But I didn't mean nothink o' what happened," he repeated, doggedly going off again into a rapid yet, on the whole, vivid and consecutive account of Westall's attack, to which Marcella listened, trying to remember every word.

"Keep that for your solicitor," the inspector said at last, interrupting him; "you are only giving pain to Miss Boyce. You had better let her go to your wife."

Hurd looked steadily once more at Marcella. "It be a bad end I'm come to," he said, after a moment. "But I thank you kindly all the same. *They'll* want seein' after." He jerked his head towards the boy, then towards the outhouse or scullery where his wife was. "She takes it terr'ble hard. She wanted me to run. But I said, 'No, I'll stan' it out.' Mr. Brown at the Court 'll give you the bit wages he owes me. But they'll have to go on the Union. Everybody 'll turn their backs on them now."

"I will look after them," said Marcella, "and I will do the best I can for you. Now I will go to Mrs. Hurd."

Minta Hurd was sitting in a corner of the outhouse on the clay floor, her head leaning against the wall. The face was turned upward, the eyes shut, the mouth helplessly open. When Marcella saw her, she knew

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that the unhappy woman had already wept so much in the hours since her husband came back to her that she could weep no more. The two little girls in the scantiest of clothing, half-fastened, sat on the floor beside her, shivering and begrimed — watching her. They had been crying at the tops of their voices, but were now only whimpering miserably, and trying at intervals to dry their tear-stained cheeks with the skirts of their frocks. The baby, wrapped in an old shawl, lay on its mother's knee, asleep and unheeded. The little lean-to place, full of odds and ends of rubbish, and darkened overhead by a string of damp clothes — was intolerably cold in the damp February dawn. The children were blue; the mother felt like ice as Marcella stooped to touch her. Outcast misery could go no further.

The mother moaned as she felt Marcella's hand, then started wildly forward, straining her thin neck and swollen eyes that she might see through the two open doors of the kitchen and the outhouse.

"They're not taking him away?" she said fiercely. "Jenkins swore to me they'd give me notice."

"No, he's still there," said Marcella, her voice shaking. "The inspector 's come. You shall have notice."

Mrs. Hurd recognised her voice, and looked up at her in amazement.

"You must put this on," said Marcella, taking off the short fur cape she wore. "You are perished. Give me the baby, and wrap yourself in it."

But Mrs. Hurd put it away from her with a vehement hand.

"I'm not cold, miss — I'm burning hot. He made

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me come in here. He said he'd do better if the children and I ud go away a bit. An' I couldn't go upstairs, because — because — " she hid her face on her knees.

Marcella had a sudden sick vision of the horrors this poor creature must have gone through since her husband had appeared to her, splashed with the blood of his enemy, under that same marvellous moon which —

Her mind repelled its own memories with haste. Moreover, she was aware of the inspector standing at the kitchen door and beckoning to her. She stole across to him so softly that Mrs. Hurd did not hear her.

"We have found all we want," he said in his official tone, but under his breath — "the clothes anyway. We must now look for the gun. Jenkins is first going to take him off to Widrington. The inquest will be held to-morrow here, at 'The Green Man.' We shall bring him over." Then he added in another voice, touching his hat, "I don't like leaving you, miss, in this place. Shall Jenkins go and fetch somebody to look after that poor thing? They'll be all swarming in here as soon as we've gone."

"No, I'll stay for a while. I'll look after her. They won't come in if I'm here. Except his sister — Mrs. Mullins — she may come in, of course, if she wants."

The inspector hesitated.

"I'm going now to meet Mr. Raeburn, miss. I'll tell him that you're here."

"He knows," said Marcella, briefly. "Now are you ready?"

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He signed assent, and Marcella went back to the wife.

"Mrs. Hurd," she said, kneeling on the ground beside her, "they're going."

The wife sprang up with a cry and ran into the kitchen, where Hurd was already on his feet between Jenkins and another policeman, who were to convey him to the gaol at Widrington. But when she came face to face with her husband something — perhaps the nervous appeal in his strained eyes — checked her, and she controlled herself piteously. She did not even attempt to kiss him. With her eyes on the ground, she put her hand on his arm. "They'll let me come and see you, Jim?" she said, trembling.

"Yes; you can find out the rules," he said shortly. "Don't let them children cry. They want their breakfast to warm them. There's plenty of coal. I brought a sack home from Jellaby's last night myself. Goodbye."

"Now, march," said the inspector, sternly, pushing the wife back.

Marcella put her arm round the shaking woman. The door opened; and beyond the three figures as they passed out, her eye passed to the waiting crowd, then to the misty expanse of common and the dark woods behind, still wrapped in fog.

When Mrs. Hurd saw the rows of people waiting within a stone's throw of the door she shrank back. Perhaps it struck her, as it struck Marcella, that every face was the face of a foe. Marcella ran to the door as the inspector stepped out, and locked it after him. Mrs. Hurd, hiding herself behind a bit of baize cur-

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tain, watched the two policemen mount with Hurd into the fly that was waiting, and then followed it with her eyes along the bit of straight road, uttering sounds the while of low anguish, which wrung the heart in Marcella's breast. Looking back in after days it always seemed to her that for this poor soul the true parting, the true wrench between life and life, came at this moment.

She went up to her, her own tears running over.

"You must come and lie down," she said, recovering herself as quickly as possible. "You and the children are both starved, and you will want your strength if you are to help him. I will see to things."

She put the helpless woman on the wooden settle by the fireplace, rolling up her cloak to make a pillow.

"Now, Willie, you sit by your mother. Daisy, where's the cradle? Put the baby down and come and help me make the fire."

The dazed children did exactly as they were told, and the mother lay like a log on the settle. Marcella found coal and wood under Daisy's guidance, and soon lit the fire, piling on the fuel with a lavish hand. Daisy brought her water, and she filled the kettle and set it on to boil, while the little girl, still sobbing at intervals like some little weeping automaton, laid the breakfast. Then the children all crouched round the warmth, while Marcella rubbed their cold hands and feet, and "mothered" them. Shaken as she was with emotion and horror, she was yet full of a passionate joy that this pity, this tendance was allowed to her. The crushing weight of self-contempt had lifted. She felt morally free and at ease.

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Already she was revolving what she could do for Hurd. It was as clear as daylight to her that there had been no murder but a free fight — an even chance between him and Westall. The violence of a hard and tyrannous man had provoked his own destruction — so it stood, for her passionate protesting sense. That at any rate must be the defence, and some able man must be found to press it. She thought she would write to the Cravens and consult them. Her thoughts carefully avoided the names both of Aldous Raeburn and of Wharton.

She was about to make the tea when some one knocked at the door. It proved to be Hurd's sister, a helpless woman, with a face swollen by crying, who seemed to be afraid to come into the cottage, and afraid to go near her sister-in-law. Marcella gave her money, and sent her for some eggs to the neighbouring shop, then told her to come back in half an hour and take charge. She was an incapable, but there was nothing better to be done. "Where is Miss Harden?" she asked the woman. The answer was that ever since the news came to the village the rector and his sister had been with Mrs. Westall and Charlie Dyne's mother. Mrs. Westall had gone into fit after fit; it had taken two to hold her, and Charlie's mother, who was in bed recovering from pneumonia, had also been very bad.

Again Marcella's heart contracted with rage rather than pity. Such wrack and waste of human life, moral and physical! for what? For the protection of a hateful sport which demoralised the rich and their agents, no less than it tempted and provoked the poor!

When she had fed and physically comforted the

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children, she went and knelt down beside Mrs. Hurd, who still lay with closed eyes in heavy-breathing stupor.

"Dear Mrs. Hurd," she said, "I want you to drink this tea and eat something."

The half-stupefied woman signed refusal. But Marcella insisted.

"You have got to fight for your husband's life," she said firmly, "and to look after your children. I must go in a very short time, and before I go you must tell me all that you can of this business. Hurd would tell you to do it. He knows and you know that I am to be trusted. I want to save him. I shall get a good lawyer to help him. But first you must take this — and then you must talk to me."

The habit of obedience to a "lady," established long ago in years of domestic service, held. The miserable wife submitted to be fed, looked with forlorn wonder at the children round the fire, and then sank back with a groan. In her tension of feeling Marcella for an impatient moment thought her a poor creature. Then with quick remorse she put her arms tenderly round her, raised the dishevelled grey-streaked head on her shoulder, and stooping, kissed the marred face, her own lips quivering.

"You are not alone," said the girl with her whole soul. "You shall never be alone while I live. Now tell me."

She made the white and gasping woman sit up in a corner of the settle, and she herself got a stool and established herself a little way off, frowning, self-contained, and determined to make out the truth.

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"Shall I send the children upstairs?" she asked.

"No!" said the boy, suddenly, in his husky voice, shaking his head with energy, "I'm not a-going."

"Oh! he's safe — is Willie," said Mrs. Hurd, looking at him, but strangely, and as it were from a long distance, "and the others is too little."

Then gradually Marcella got the story out of her — first, the misery of alarm and anxiety in which she had lived ever since the Tudley End raid, owing first to her knowledge of Hurd's connection with it, and with the gang that had carried it out; then to her appreciation of the quick and ghastly growth of the hatred between him and Westall; lastly, to her sense of ingratitude towards those who had been kind to them.

"I knew we was acting bad towards you. I told Jim so. I couldn't hardly bear to see you come in. But there, miss, — I couldn't do anything. I tried, oh! the Lord knows I tried! There was never no happiness between us at last, I talked so. But I don't believe he could help himself — he's not made like other folks, isn't Jim — "

Her features became convulsed again with the struggle for speech. Marcella reached out for the toil-disfigured hand that was fingering and clutching at the edge of the settle, and held it close. Gradually she made out that although Hurd had not been able of course to conceal his night absences from his wife, he had kept his connection with the Oxford gang absolutely dark from her, till, in his wild exultation over Westall's discomfiture in the Tudley End raid, he had said things in his restless snatches of sleep which

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had enabled her to get the whole truth out of him by degrees. Her reproaches, her fears, had merely angered and estranged him; her nature had had somehow to accommodate itself to his, lest affection should lose its miserable all.

As to this last fatal attack on the Maxwell coverts, it was clear to Marcella, as she questioned and listened, that the wife had long foreseen it, and that she now knew much more about it than — suddenly — she would allow herself to say. For in the midst of her outpourings she drew herself together, tried to collect and calm herself, looked at Marcella with an agonised, suspicious eye, and fell silent.

"I don't know nothing about it, miss," she stubbornly declared at last, with an inconsequent absurdity which smote Marcella's pity afresh. "How am I to know? There was seven o' them Oxford fellows at Tudley End — that I know. Who's to say as Jim was with 'em at all last night? Who's to say as it wasn't them as —"

She stopped, shivering. Marcella held her reluctant hand.

"You don't know," she said quietly, "that I saw your husband in here for a minute before I came in to you, and that he told me, as he had already told Jenkins, that it was in a struggle with him that Westall was shot, but that he had fired in self-defence because Westall was attacking him. You don't know, too, that Charlie Dynes is alive, and says he saw Hurd —"

"Charlie Dynes!" Mrs. Hurd gave a shriek, and then fell to weeping and trembling again, so that Marcella had need of patience.

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"If you can't help me more," she said at last in despair, "I don't know what we shall do. Listen to me. Your husband will be charged with Westall's murder. That I am sure of. He says it was not murder — that it happened in a fight. I believe it. I want to get a lawyer to prove it. I am your friend — you know I am. But if you are not going to help me by telling me what you know of last night I may as well go home — and get your sister-in-law to look after you and the children."

She rose as she spoke. Mrs. Hurd clutched at her.

"Oh, my God!" she said, looking straight before her vacantly at the children, who at once began to cry again. "*Oh, my God!* Look here, miss" — her voice dropped, her swollen eyes fixed themselves on Marcella — the words came out in a low, hurried stream — "It was just after four o'clock I heard that door turn; I got up in my nightgown and ran down, and there was Jim. 'Put that light out,' he says to me, sharp like. 'Oh, Jim,' says I, 'wherever have you been? You'll be the death o' me and them poor children!' 'You go to bed,' says he to me, 'and I'll come presently.' But I could see him, 'cos of the moon, almost as plain as day, an' I couldn't take my eyes off him. And he went about the kitchen so strange like, puttin' down his hat and takin' it up again, an' I saw he hadn't got his gun. So I went up and caught holt on him. An' he gave me a push back. 'Can't you let me alone?' he says; 'you'll know soon enough.' An' then I looked at my sleeve where I'd touched him — oh, my God! my God!"

Marcella, white to the lips and shuddering too,

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held her tight. She had the *seeing* faculty which goes with such quick, nervous natures, and she saw the scene as though she had been there — the moonlit cottage, the miserable husband and wife, the life-blood on the woman's sleeve.

Mrs. Hurd went on in a torrent of half-finished sentences and fragments of remembered talk. She told her husband's story of the encounter with the keepers as he had told it to her, of course with additions and modifications already struck out by the agony of inventive pain ; she described how she had made him take his blood-stained clothes and hide them in a hole in the roof; then how she had urged him to strike across country at once and get a few hours start before the ghastly business was known. But the more he talked to her the more confident he became of his own story, and the more determined to stay and brave it out. Besides, he was shrewd enough to see that escape for a man of his deformity was impossible, and he tried to make her understand it so. But she was mad and blind with fear, and at last, just as the light was coming in, he told her roughly, to end their long wrestle, that he should go to bed and get some sleep. She would make a fool of him, and he should want all his wits. She followed him up the steep ladder to their room, weeping. And there was little Willie sitting up in bed, choking with the phlegm in his throat, and half dead of fright because of the voices below.

"And when Hurd see him, he went and cuddled him up, and rubbed his legs and feet to warm them, an' I could hear him groanin'. And I says to him,

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'Jim, if you won't go for my sake, will you go for the boy's?' For you see, miss, there was a bit of money in the house, an' I thought he'd hide himself by day and walk by night, and so get to Liverpool perhaps, and off to the States. An' it seemed as though my head would burst with listening for people comin', and him taken up there like a rat in a trap, an' no way of provin' the truth, and everybody agen him, because of the things he'd said. And he burst out a-cryin', an' Willie cried. An' I came an' entreated of him. An' he kissed me; an' at last he said he'd go. An' I made haste, the light was getting so terrible strong; an' just as he'd got to the foot of the stairs, an' I was holding little Willie in my arms an' saying good-bye to him —"

She let her head sink against the settle. There was no more to say, and Marcella asked no more questions — she sat thinking. Willie stood, a wasted, worn figure, by his mother, stroking her face; his hoarse breathing was for the time the only sound in the cottage.

Then Marcella heard a loud knock at the door. She got up and looked through the casement window. The crowd had mostly dispersed, but a few people stood about on the green, and a policeman was stationed outside the cottage. On the steps stood Aldous Raeburn, his horse held behind him by a boy.

She went and opened the door.

"I will come," she said at once. "There — I see Mrs. Mullins crossing the common. Now I can leave her."

Aldous, taking off his hat, closed the door behind

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him, and stood with his hand on Marcella's arm, looking at the huddled woman on the settle, at the pale children. There was a solemnity in his expression, a mixture of judgment and pity which showed that the emotion of other scenes also — scenes through which he had just passed — was entering into it.

"Poor unhappy souls," he said slowly, under his breath. "You say that you have got some one to see after her. She looks as though it might kill her, too."

Marcella nodded. Now that her task, for the moment, was nearly over, she could hardly restrain herself nervously or keep herself from crying. Aldous observed her with disquiet as she put on her hat. His heart was deeply stirred. She had chosen more nobly for herself than he would have chosen for her, in thus daring an awful experience for the sake of mercy. His moral sense, exalted and awed by the sight of death, approved, worshipped her. His man's impatience pined to get her away, to cherish and comfort her. Why, she could hardly have slept three hours since they parted on the steps of the Court, amidst the crowd of carriages!

Mrs. Mullins came in still scared and weeping, and dropping frightened curtseys to "Muster Raeburn." Marcella spoke to her a little in a whisper, gave some counsels which filled Aldous with admiration for the girl's practical sense and thoughtfulness, and promised to come again later. Mrs. Hurd neither moved nor opened her eyes.

"Can you walk?" said Aldous, bending over her, as they stood outside the cottage. "I can see that

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you are worn out. Could you sit my horse if I led him?"

"No, let us walk."

They went on together, followed by the eyes of the village, the boy leading the horse some distance behind.

"Where have you been?" said Marcella, when they had passed the village. "Oh, *please* don't think of my being tired! I had so much rather know it all. I must know it all."

She was deathly pale, but her black eyes flashed impatience and excitement. She even drew her hand out of the arm where Aldous was tenderly holding it, and walked on erect by herself.

"I have been with poor Dynes," said Aldous, sadly; "we had to take his deposition. He died while I was there."

"He died?"

"Yes. The fiends who killed him had left small doubt of that. But he lived long enough, thank God, to give the information which will, I think, bring them to justice!"

The tone of the magistrate and the magnate goaded Marcella's quivering nerves.

"What is justice?" she cried; "the system that wastes human lives in protecting your tame pheasants?"

A cloud came over the stern clearness of his look. He gave a bitter sigh — the sigh of the man to whom his own position in life had been, as it were, one long scruple.

"You may well ask that!" he said. "You cannot

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imagine that I did not ask it of myself a hundred times as I stood by that poor fellow's bedside."

They walked on in silence. She was hardly appeased. There was a deep, inner excitement in her urging her towards difference, towards attack. At last he resumed:

"But whatever the merits of our present game system may be, the present case is surely clear — horribly clear. Six men, with at least three guns among them, probably more, go out on a pheasant-stealing expedition. They come across two keepers, one a lad of seventeen, who have nothing but a light stick apiece. The boy is beaten to death, the keeper shot dead at the first brush by a man who has been his life-long enemy, and threatened several times in public to 'do for him.' If that is not brutal and deliberate murder, it is difficult to say what is!"

Marcella stood still in the misty road trying to command herself.

"It was *not* deliberate," she said at last with difficulty; "not in Hurd's case. I have heard it all from his own mouth. It was a *struggle* — he might have been killed instead of Westall — Westall attacked, Hurd defended himself."

Aldous shook his head.

"Of course Hurd would tell you so," he said sadly, "and his poor wife. He is not a bad or vicious fellow, like the rest of the rascally pack. Probably when he came to himself, after the moment of rage, he could not simply believe what he had done. But that makes no difference. It was murder; no judge or jury could possibly take any other view. Dynes's

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evidence is clear, and the proof of motive is overwhelming."

Then, as he saw her pallor and trembling, he broke off in deep distress. "My dear one, if I could but have kept you out of this!"

They were alone in the misty road. The boy with the horse was out of sight. He would fain have put his arm round her, have consoled and supported her. But she would not let him.

"Please understand," she said in a sort of gasp, as she drew herself away, "that I do *not* believe Hurd is guilty — that I shall do my very utmost to defend him. He is to me the victim of unjust, abominable laws! If *you* will not help me to protect him — then I must look to some one else."

Aldous felt a sudden stab of suspicion — presentiment.

"Of course he will be well defended; he will have every chance; that you may be sure of," he said slowly.

Marcella controlled herself, and they walked on. As they entered the drive of Mellor, Aldous thought passionately of those divine moments in his sitting-room, hardly yet nine hours old. And now — *now!* — she walked beside him as an enemy.

The sound of a step on the gravel in front of them made them look up. Past, present, and future met in the girl's bewildered and stormy sense as she recognised Wharton.

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CHAPTER X.

THE first sitting of the Birmingham Labour Congress was just over, and the streets about the hall in which it had been held were beginning to fill with the issuing delegates. Rain was pouring down and umbrellas were plentiful.

Harry Wharton, accompanied by a group of men, left the main entrance of the hall,— releasing himself with difficulty from the friendly crowd about the doors — and crossed the street to his hotel.

"Well, I'm glad you think I did decently," he said, as they mounted the hotel stairs. "What a beastly day, and how stuffy that hall was! Come in and have something to drink."

He threw open the door of his sitting-room as he spoke. The four men with him followed him in.

"I must go back to the hall to see two or three men before everybody disperses," said the one in front. "No refreshment for me, thank you, Mr. Wharton. But I want to ask a question — what arrangements have you made for the reporting of your speech?"

The man who spoke was thin and dark, with a modest kindly eye. He wore a black frock coat, and had the air of a minister.

"Oh, thank you, Bennett, it's all right. The *Post*,

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the *Chronicle*, and the *Northern Guardian* will have full copies. I sent them off before the meeting. And my own paper, of course. As to the rest they may report it as they like. I don't care."

"They'll all have it," said another man, bluntly. "It's the best speech you've ever made — the best president's speech we've had yet, I say,— don't you think so?"

The speaker, a man called Casey, turned to the two men behind him. Both nodded.

"Hallin's speech last year was first-rate," he continued, "but somehow Hallin damps you down, at least he did me last year; what you want just now is *fight* — and, my word! Mr. Wharton let 'em have it!"

And standing with his hands on his sides, he glanced round from one to another. His own face was flushed, partly from the effects of a crowded hall and bad air, but mostly with excitement. All the men present indeed — though it was less evident in Bennett and Wharton than in the rest — had the bright nervous look which belongs to leaders keenly conscious of standing well with the led, and of having just emerged successfully from an agitating ordeal. As they stood together they went over the speech to which they had been listening, and the scene which had followed it, in a running stream of talk, laughter, and gossip. Wharton took little part, except to make a joke occasionally at his own expense, but the pleasure on his smiling lip, and in his roving, contented eye was not to be mistaken. The speech he had just delivered had been first thought out as he paced the moonlit library and corridor at Mellor. After Mar-

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cella had left him, and he was once more in his own room, he had had the extraordinary self-control to write it out, and make two or three machine-copies of it for the press. Neither its range nor its logical order had suffered for that intervening experience. The programme of labour for the next five years had never been better presented, more boldly planned, more eloquently justified. Hallin's presidential speech of the year before, as Casey said, rang flat in the memory when compared with it. Wharton knew that he had made a mark, and knew also that his speech had given him the whip-hand of some fellows who would otherwise have stood in his way.

Casey was the first man to cease talking about the speech. He had already betrayed himself about it more than he meant. He belonged to the New Unionism, and affected a costume in character — fustian trousers, flannel shirt, a full red tie and workman's coat, all well calculated to set off a fine lion-like head and broad shoulders. He had begun life as a bricklayer's labourer, and was now the secretary of a recently formed Union. His influence had been considerable, but was said to be already on the wane; though it was thought likely that he would win a seat in the coming Parliament.

The other two men were Molloy, secretary to the congress, short, smooth-faced, and wiry, a man whose pleasant eye and manner were often misleading, since he was in truth one of the hottest fighting men of a fighting movement; and Wilkins, a friend of Casey's — ex-iron worker, Union official, and Labour candidate for a Yorkshire division — an uneducated, pas-

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sionate fellow, speaking with a broad, Yorkshire accent, a bad man of affairs, but honest, and endowed with the influence which comes of sincerity, together with a gift for speaking and superhuman powers of physical endurance.

"Well, I'm glad it's over," said Wharton, throwing himself into a chair with a long breath, and at the same time stretching out his hand to ring the bell. "Casey, some whisky? No? Nor you, Wilkins? nor Molloy? As for you, Bennett, I know it's no good asking you. By George! our grandfathers would have thought us a poor lot! Well, some coffee at any rate you must all of you have before you go back. Waiter! coffee. By the way, I have been seeing something of Hallin, Bennett, down in the country."

He took out his cigarette case as he spoke, and offered it to the others. All refused except Molloy. Casey took his half-smoked pipe out of his pocket and lit up. He was not a teetotaler as the others were, but he would have scorned to drink his whisky and water at the expense of a "gentleman" like Wharton, or to smoke the "gentleman's" cigarettes. His class-pride was irritably strong. Molloy, who was by nature anybody's equal, took the cigarette with an easy good manners, which made Casey look at him askance.

Mr. Bennett drew his chair close to Wharton's. The mention of Hallin had roused a look of anxiety in his quick dark eyes.

"How is he, Mr. Wharton? The last letter I had from him he made light of his health. But you know he only just avoided a breakdown in that strike busi-

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ness. We only pulled him through by the skin of his teeth — Mr. Raeburn and I."

"Oh, he's no constitution; never had, I suppose. But he seemed much as usual. He's staying with Raeburn, you know, and I've been staying with the father of the young lady whom Raeburn 's going to marry."

"Ah! I've heard of that," said Bennett, with a look of interest. "Well, Mr. Raeburn isn't on our side, but for judgment and fair dealing there are very few men of his class and circumstances I would trust as I would him. The lady should be happy."

"Of course," said Wharton, drily. "However, neither she nor Raeburn are very happy just at this moment. A horrible affair happened down there last night. One of Lord Maxwell's gamekeepers and a 'helper,' a lad of seventeen, were killed last night in a fight with poachers. I only just heard the outlines of it before I came away, but I got a telegram just before going into congress, asking me to defend the man charged with the murder."

A quick expression of repulsion and disgust crossed Bennett's face.

"There have been a whole crop of such cases lately," he said. "How shall we ever escape from the *curse* of this game system?"

"We shan't escape it," said Wharton, quietly, knocking the end off his cigarette, "not in your lifetime or mine. When we get more Radicals on the bench we shall lighten the sentences; but that will only exasperate the sporting class into finding new ways of protecting themselves. Oh! the man will be

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hung — that's quite clear to me. But it will be a good case — from the public point of view — will work up well — "

He ran his hand through his curls, considering.

"Will work up admirably," he added in a lower tone of voice, as though to himself, his eyes keen and brilliant as ever, in spite of the marks of sleeplessness and fatigue visible in the rest of the face, though only visible there since he had allowed himself the repose of his cigarette and arm-chair.

"Are yo' comin' to dine at the 'Peterloo' to-night, Mr. Wharton?" said Wilkins, as Wharton handed him a cup of coffee; "but of coorse you are — part of yower duties, I suppose?"

While Molloy and Casey were deep in animated discussion of the great meeting of the afternoon he had been sitting silent against the edge of the table — a short-bearded sombre figure, ready at any moment to make a grievance, to suspect a slight.

"I'm afraid I can't," said Wharton, bending forward and speaking in a tone of concern; "that was just what I was going to ask you all — if you would make my excuses to-night? I have been explaining to Bennett. I have an important piece of business in the country — a labourer has been getting into trouble for shooting a keeper; they have asked me to defend him. The assizes come on in little more than a fortnight, worse luck! so that the time is short — "

And he went on to explain that, by taking an evening train back to Widrington, he could get the following (Saturday) morning with the solicitor in charge of the case, and be back in Birmingham, thanks to

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the convenience of a new line lately opened, in time for the second meeting of the congress, which was fixed for the early afternoon.

He spoke with great cordiality and persuasiveness. Among the men who surrounded him, his youth, good looks, and easy breeding shone out conspicuous. In the opinion of Wilkins, indeed, who followed his every word and gesture, he was far too well dressed and too well educated. A day would soon come when the labour movement would be able to show these young aristocrats the door. Not yet, however.

"Well, I thowt you wouldn't dine with us," he said, turning away with a blunt laugh.

Bennett's mild eye showed annoyance. "Mr. Wharton has explained himself very fully, I think," he said, turning to the others. "We shall miss him at dinner — but this matter seems to be one of life and death. And we mustn't forget anyway that Mr. Wharton is fulfilling this engagement at great inconvenience to himself. We none of us knew when we elected him last year that he would have to be fighting his election at the same time. Next Saturday, isn't it?"

Bennett rose as he spoke and carefully buttoned his coat. It was curious to contrast his position among his fellows — one of marked ascendency and authority — with his small insignificant physique. He had a gentle deprecating eye, and the heart of a poet. He played the flute and possessed the gift of repeating verse — especially Ebenezer Eliot's Corn Law Rhymes — so as to stir a great audience to enthusiasm or tears. The Wesleyan community of his native Che-

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shire village owned no more successful class-leader, and no humbler Christian. At the same time he could hold a large business meeting sternly in check, was the secretary of one of the largest and oldest Unions in the country, had been in Parliament for years, and was generally looked upon even by the men who hated his "moderate" policy, as a power not to be ignored.

"Next Saturday. Yes!" said Wharton, nodding in answer to his inquiry.

"Well, are you going to do it?" said Casey, looking round at him.

"Oh, yes!" said Wharton, cheerfully; "oh, yes! we shall do it. We shall settle old Dodgson, I think."

"Are the Raeburns as strong as they were?" asked Molloy, who knew Brookshire.

"What landlord is? Since '84 the ground is mined for them all — good and bad — and they know it."

"The mine takes a long time blowing up — too long for my patience," said Wilkins, gruffly. "How the country can go on year after year paying its tribute to these plunderers passes my comprehension. But you may attack them as you please. You will never get any forrarder so long as Parliament and the Cabinet is made up of them and their hangers on."

Wharton looked at him brightly, but silently, making a little assenting inclination of the head. He was not surprised that anything should pass Wilkins's comprehension, and he was determined to give him no opening for holding forth.

"Well, we'll let you alone," said Bennett. "You'll have very little time to get off in. We'll make your

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excuses, Mr. Wharton. You may be sure everybody is so pleased with your speech we shall find them all in a good temper. It was grand! — let me congratulate you again. Good-night — I hope you'll get your poacher off!"

The others followed suit, and they all took leave in character; — Molloy, with an eager business reference to the order of the day for Saturday, — "Give me your address at Widrington; I'll post you everything to-night, so that you may have it all under your eye" — Casey, with the off-hand patronage of the man who would not for the world have his benevolence mistaken for servility, — and Wilkins with as gruff a nod and as limp a shake of the hand as possible. It might perhaps have been read in the manner of the last two, that although this young man had just made a most remarkable impression, and was clearly destined to go far, they were determined not to yield themselves to him a moment before they must. In truth, both were already jealous of him; whereas Molloy, absorbed in the business of the congress, cared for nothing except to know whether in the next two days' debates Wharton would show himself as good a chairman as he was an orator; and Bennett, while saying no word that he did not mean, was fully conscious of an inner judgment, which pronounced five minutes of Edward Hallin's company to be worth more to him than anything which this brilliant young fellow could do or say.

Wharton saw them out, then came back and threw himself again into his chair by the window. The

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venetian blinds were not closed, and he looked out on a wide and handsome street of tall red-brick houses and shops, crowded with people and carriages, and lit with a lavishness of gas which overcame even the February dark and damp. But he noticed nothing, and even the sensation of his triumph was passing off. He was once more in the Mellor drive; Aldous Raeburn and Marcella stood in front of him; the thrill of the moment beat once more in his pulse.

He buried his head in his hands and thought. The news of the murder had reached him from Mr. Boyce. The master of Mellor had heard the news from William, the man-servant, at half-past seven, and had instantly knocked up his guest, by way of sharing the excitement with which his own feeble frame was throbbing.

"By Gad! I never heard such an *atrocious* business," said the invalid, his thin hand shaking against his dressing-gown. "That's what your Radical notions bring us to! We shall have them plundering and burning the country houses next."

"I don't think my Radical notions have much to do with it," said Wharton, composedly.

But there was a red spot in his cheeks which belied his manner. So when he — *they* — saw Hurd cross the avenue he was on his way to this deed of blood. The shot that he, Wharton, had heard had been the shot which slew Westall? Probably. Well, what was the bearing of it? Could she keep her own counsel or would they find themselves in the witness box? The idea quickened his pulse amazingly.

"Any clue? Any arrests?" he asked of his host.

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"Why, I told you," said Boyce, testily, though as a matter of fact he had said nothing. "They have got that man Hurd. The ruffian has been a marked man by the keepers and police, they tell me, for the last year or more. And there's my daughter has been pampering him and his wife all the time, and *preaching* to me about them! She got Raeburn even to take him on at the Court. I trust it will be a lesson to her."

Wharton drew a breath of relief. So the man was in custody, and there was other evidence. Good! There was no saying what a woman's conscience might be capable of, even against her friends and herself.

When Mr. Boyce at last left him free to dress and make his preparations for the early train, by which the night before, after the ladies' departure for the ball, he had suddenly made up his mind to leave Mellor, it was some time before Wharton could rouse himself to action. The situation absorbed him. Miss Boyce's friend was now in imminent danger of his neck, and Miss Boyce's thoughts must be of necessity concentrated upon his plight and that of his family. He foresaw the passion, the *saeva indignatio*, that she must ultimately throw — the general situation being what it was — into the struggle for Hurd's life. Whatever the evidence might be, he would be to her either victim or champion — and Westall, of course, merely the Holofernes of the piece.

How would Raeburn take it? Ah, well! the situation must develop. It occurred to him, however, that he would catch an earlier train to Widrington than the one he had fixed on, and have half an hour's talk

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with a solicitor who was a good friend of his before going on to Birmingham. Accordingly, he rang for William — who came, all staring and dishevelled, fresh from the agitation of the servants' hall — gave orders for his luggage to be sent after him, got as much fresh information as he could from the excited lad, plunged into his bath, and finally emerged, fresh and vigorous in every nerve, showing no trace whatever of the fact that two hours of broken sleep had been his sole portion for a night, in which he had gone through emotions and sustained a travail of brain either of which would have left their mark on most men.

Then the meeting in the drive! How plainly he saw them both — Raeburn grave and pale, Marcella in her dark serge skirt and cap, with an eye all passion and a cheek white as her hand.

"A tragic splendour enwrapped her! — a fierce heroic air. She was the embodiment of the moment — of the melancholy morning with its rain and leafless woods — of the human anguish throbbing in the little village. And I, who had seen her last in her festal dress, who had held her warm perfumed youth in my arms, who had watched in her white breast the heaving of the heart that I — *I* had troubled! — how did I find it possible to stand and face her? But I did. It rushed through me at once *how* I would make her forgive me — how I would regain possession of her. I had thought the play was closed: it was suddenly plain to me that the second act was but just beginning. She and Raeburn had already come to

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words — I knew it directly I saw them. This business will divide them more and more. His *conscience* will come in — and a Raeburn's conscience is the devil!

"By now he hates me; every word I speak to him — still more every word to her — galls him. But he controlled himself when I made him tell me the story — I had no reason to complain — though every now and then I could see him wince under the knowledge I must needs show of the persons and places concerned — a knowledge I could only have got from *her*. And she stood by meanwhile like a statue. Not a word, not a look, so far, though she had been forced to touch my hand. But my instinct saved me. I roused her — I played upon her! I took the line that I was morally certain *she* had been taking in their *tête-à-tête*. Why not a scuffle? — a general scrimmage? — in which it was matter of accident who fell? The man surely was inoffensive and gentle, incapable of deliberate murder. And as to the evidence of hatred, it told both ways. He stiffened and was silent. What a fine brow he has — a look sometimes, when he is moved, of antique power and probity! But she — she trembled — animation came back. She would almost have spoken to me — but I did well not to prolong it — to hurry on."

Then he took the telegram out of his pocket which had been put into his hands as he reached the hotel, his mouth quivering again with the exultation which he had felt when he had received it. It recalled to his ranging memory all the details of his hurried interview with the little Widrington solicitor, who had

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already scented a job in the matter of Hurd's defence. This man — needy, shrewd, and well equipped with local knowledge — had done work for Wharton and the party, and asked nothing better than to stand well with the future member for the division. "There is a lady," Wharton had said, "the daughter of Mr. Boyce of Mellor, who is already very much interested in this fellow and his family. She takes this business greatly to heart. I have seen her this morning, but had no time to discuss the matter with her. She will, I have little doubt, try to help the relations in the arrangements for the defence. Go to her this morning — tell her that the case has my sympathy — that, as she knows, I am a barrister, and, if she wishes it, I will defend Hurd. I shall be hard put to it to get up the case with the election coming on, but I will do it — for the sake of the public interest involved. You understand? Her father is a Tory — and she is just about to marry Mr. Raeburn. Her position, therefore, is difficult. Nevertheless, she will feel strongly — she does feel strongly about this case, and about the whole game system — and I feel moved to support her. She will take her own line, whatever happens. See her — see the wife, too, who is entirely under Miss Boyce's influence — and wire to me at my hotel at Birmingham. If they wish to make other arrangements, well and good. I shall have all the more time to give to the election."

Leaving this commission behind him, he had started on his journey. At the end of it a telegram had been handed to him on the stairs of his hotel:

"Have seen the lady, also Mrs. Hurd. You are urgently asked to undertake defence."

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He spread it out before him now, and pondered it. The bit of flimsy paper contained for him the promise of all he most coveted, — influence, emotion, excitement. "She will have returns upon herself," he thought smiling, "when I see her again. She will be dignified, resentful; she will suspect everything I say or do — still more, she will suspect herself. No matter! The situation is in my hands. Whether I succeed or fail, she will be forced to work with me, to consult with me — she will owe me gratitude. What made her consent? — she must have felt it in some sort a humiliation. Is it that Raeburn has been driving her to strong measures — that she wants, womanlike, to win, and thought me after all her best chance, and put her pride in her pocket? Or is it? — ah! one should put *that* out of one's head. It's like wine — it unsteadies one. And for a thing like this one must go into training. Shall I write to her — there is just time now, before I start — take the lofty tone, the equal masculine tone, which I have noticed she likes? — ask her pardon for an act of madness — before we go together to the rescue of a life? It might do — it might go down. But no, I think not! Let the situation develop itself. Action and reaction — the unexpected — I commit myself to that. *She* — marry Aldous Raeburn in a month? Well, she may — certainly she may. But there is no need for me, I think, to take it greatly into account. Curious! twenty-four hours ago I thought it all done with — dead and done with. 'So like Provvy,' as Bentham used to say, when he heard of anything particularly unseemly in the way of natural catastrophe. Now to dine, and

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be off! How little sleep can I do with in the next fortnight?"

He rang, ordered his cab, and then went to the coffee-room for some hasty food. As he was passing one of the small tables with which the room was filled, a man who was dining there with a friend recognised him and gave him a cold nod. Wharton walked on to the further end of the room, and, while waiting for his meal, buried himself in the local evening paper, which already contained a report of his speech.

"Did you see that man?" asked the stranger of his friend.

"The small young fellow with the curly hair?"

"Small young fellow, indeed! He is the wiriest athlete I know — extraordinary physical strength for his size — and one of the cleverest rascals out as a politician. I am a neighbour of his in the country. His property joins mine. I knew his father — a little, dried-up old chap of the old school — very elegant manners and very obstinate — worried to death by his wife — oh, my goodness! such a woman!"

"What's the name?" said the friend, interrupting.

"Wharton — H. S. Wharton. His mother was a daughter of Lord Westgate, and *her* mother was an actress whom the old lord married in his dotage. Lady Mildred Wharton was like Garrick, only natural when she was acting, which she did on every possible occasion. A preposterous woman! Old Wharton ought to have beaten her for her handwriting, and murdered her for her gowns. Her signature took a sheet of note-paper, and as for her dress I never could get out of her way. Whatever part of the room I

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happened to be in I always found my feet tangled in her skirts. Somehow, I never could understand how she was able to find so much stuff of one pattern. But it was only to make you notice her, like all the rest. Every bit of her was a pose, and the maternal pose was the worst of all."

"H. S. Wharton?" said the other. "Why, that's the man who has been speaking here to-day. I've just been reading the account of it in the *Evening Star*. A big meeting — called by a joint committee of the leading Birmingham trades to consider the Liberal election programme as it affects labour — that's the man — he's been at it hammer and tongs — red-hot — all the usual devices for harrying the employer out of existence, with a few trifles — graduated income-tax and land nationalisation — thrown in. Oh! that's the man, is it? — they say he had a great reception — spoke brilliantly — and is certainly going to get into Parliament next week."

The speaker, who had the air of a shrewd and prosperous manufacturer, put up his eyeglass to look at this young Robespierre. His *vis-à-vis* — a stout country gentleman who had been in the army and knocked about the world before coming into his estate — shrugged his shoulders.

"So I hear — he daren't show his nose as a candidate in *our* part of the world, though of course he does us all the harm he can. I remember a good story of his mother — she quarrelled with her husband and all her relations, his and hers, and then she took to speaking in public, accompanied by her dear boy. On one occasion she was speaking at a market town

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near us, and telling the farmers that as far as she was concerned she would like to see the big properties cut up to-morrow. The sooner her father's and husband's estates were made into small holdings stocked with public capital the better. After it was all over, a friend of mine, who was there, was coming home in a sort of omnibus that ran between the town and a neighbouring village. He found himself between two fat farmers, and this was the conversation — broad Lincolnshire, of course: 'Did tha hear Lady Mildred Wharton say them things, Willum?' 'Aye, a did.' 'What did tha think, Willum?' 'What did *tha* think, George?' 'Wal, *aa* thowt Laady Mildred Wharton wor a graät fule, Willum, if tha asks me.' 'I'll uphowd tha, George! I'll uphowd tha!' said the other, and then they talked no more for the rest of the journey."

The friend laughed.

"So it was from the dear mamma that the young man got his opinions?"

"Of course. She dragged him into every absurdity she could from the time he was fifteen. When the husband died she tried to get the servants to come in to meals, but the butler struck. So did Wharton himself, who, for a Socialist, has always showed a very pretty turn for comfort. I am bound to say he was cut up when she died. It was the only time I ever felt like being civil to him — in those months after she departed. I suppose she was devoted to him — which after all is something."

"Good heavens!" said the other, still lazily turning over the pages of the newspaper as they sat waiting for their second course, "here is another poaching

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murder — in Brookshire — the third I have noticed within a month. On Lord Maxwell's property — you know them?"

"I know the old man a little — fine old fellow! They'll make him President of the Council, I suppose. He can't have much work left in him; but it is such a popular, respectable name. Ah! I'm sorry; the sort of thing to distress him terribly."

"I see the grandson is standing."

"Oh yes; will get in too. A queer sort of man — great ability and high character. But you can't imagine him getting on in politics, unless it's by sheer weight of wealth and family influence. He'll find a scruple in every bush — never stand the rough work of the House, or get on with the *men*. My goodness! you have to pull with some queer customers nowadays. By the way, I hear he is making an unsatisfactory marriage — a girl very handsome, but with no manners, and like nobody else — the daughter, too, of an extremely shady father. It's surprising; you'd have thought a man like Aldous Raeburn would have looked for the pick of things."

"Perhaps it was she looked for the pick of things!" said the other, with a blunt laugh. "Waiter, another bottle of champagne."

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CHAPTER XI.

MARCELLA was lying on the sofa in the Mellor drawing-room. The February evening had just been shut out, but she had told William not to bring the lamps till they were rung for. Even the fire-light seemed more than she could bear. She was utterly exhausted both in body and mind; yet, as she lay there with shut eyes, and hands clasped under her cheek, a start went through her at every sound in the house, which showed that she was not resting, but listening. She had spent the morning in the Hurds' cottage, sitting by Mrs. Hurd and nursing the little boy. Minta Hurd, always delicate and consumptive, was now generally too ill from shock and misery to be anywhere but in her bed, and Willie was growing steadily weaker, though the child's spirit was such that he would insist on dressing, on hearing and knowing everything about his father, and on moving about the house as usual. Yet every movement of his wasted bones cost him the effort of a hero, and the dumb signs in him of longing for his father increased the general impression as of some patient creature driven by Nature to monstrous and disproportionate extremity.

The plight of this handful of human beings worked in Marcella like some fevering torture. She was

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wholly out of gear physically and morally. Another practically sleepless night, peopled with images of horror, had decreased her stock of sane self-control, already lessened by long conflict of feeling and the pressure of self-contempt. Now, as she lay listening for Aldous Raeburn's ring and step, she hardly knew whether to be angry with him for coming so late, or miserable that he should come at all. That there was a long score to settle between herself and him she knew well. Shame for an experience which seemed to her maiden sense indelible — both a weakness and a treachery — lay like a dull weight on heart and conscience. But she would not realise it, she would not act upon it. She shook the moral debate from her impatiently. Aldous should have his due all in good time — should have ample opportunity of deciding whether he would, after all, marry such a girl as she. Meanwhile his attitude with regard to the murder exasperated her. Yet, in some strange way it relieved her to be angry and sore with him — to have a grievance she could avow, and on which she made it a merit to dwell. His gentle, yet firm difference of opinion with her on the subject struck her as something new in him. It gave her a kind of fierce pleasure to fight it. He seemed somehow to be providing her with excuses — to be coming down to her level — to be equalling wrong with wrong.

The door handle turned. At last! She sprang up. But it was only William coming in with the evening post. Mrs. Boyce followed him. She took a quiet look at her daughter, and asked if her headache was better, and then sat down near her to some needle-

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work. During these two days she had been unusually kind to Marcella. She had none of the little feminine arts of consolation. She was incapable of fussing, and she never caressed. But from the moment that Marcella had come home from the village that morning, a pale, hollow-eyed wreck, the mother had asserted her authority. She would not hear of the girl's crossing the threshold again; she had put her on the sofa and dosed her with sal-volatile. And Marcella was too exhausted to rebel. She had only stipulated that a note should be sent to Aldous, asking him to come on to Mellor with the news as soon as the verdict of the coroner's jury should be given. The jury had been sitting all day, and the verdict was expected in the evening.

Marcella turned over her letters till she came to one from a London firm which contained a number of cloth patterns. As she touched it she threw it aside with a sudden gesture of impatience, and sat upright.

"Mamma! I have something to say to you."

"Yes, my dear."

"Mamma, the wedding must be put off! — it *must!* — for some weeks. I have been thinking about it while I have been lying here. How *can* I? — you can see for yourself. That miserable woman depends on me altogether. How can I spend my time on clothing and dressmakers? I feel as if I could think of nothing else — nothing else in the world — but her and her children." She spoke with difficulty, her voice high and strained. "The assizes may be held that very week — who knows? — the very day we are married."

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She stopped, looking at her mother almost threateningly. Mrs. Boyce showed no sign of surprise. She put her work down.

"I had imagined you might say something of the kind," she said after a pause. "I don't know that, from your point of view, it is unreasonable. But, of course, you must understand that very few people will see it from your point of view. Aldous Raeburn may — you must know best. But his people certainly won't; and your father will think it — "

"Madness," she was going to say, but with her usual instinct for the moderate fastidious word she corrected it to "foolish."

Marcella's tired eyes were all wilfulness and defiance.

"I can't help it. I couldn't do it. I will tell Aldous at once. It must be put off for a month. And even that," she added with a shudder, "will be bad enough."

Mrs. Boyce could not help an unperceived shrug of the shoulders, and a movement of pity towards the future husband. Then she said drily, —

"You must always consider whether it is just to Mr. Raeburn to let a matter of this kind interfere so considerably with his wishes and his plans. He must, I suppose, be in London for Parliament within six weeks."

Marcella did not answer. She sat with her hands round her knees lost in perplexities. The wedding, as originally fixed, was now three weeks and three days off. After it, she and Aldous were to have spent a short fortnight's honeymoon at a famous

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house in the north, lent them for the occasion by a Duke who was a cousin of Aldous's on the mother's side, and had more houses than he knew what to do with. Then they were to go immediately up to London for the opening of Parliament. The furnishing of the Mayfair house was being pressed on. In her new-born impatience with such things, Marcella had hardly of late concerned herself with it at all, and Miss Raeburn, scandalised, yet not unwilling, had been doing the whole of it, subject to conscientious worryings of the bride, whenever she could be got hold of, on the subject of papers and curtains.

As they sat silent, the unspoken idea in the mother's mind was — "Eight weeks more will carry us past the execution." Mrs. Boyce had already possessed herself very clearly of the facts of the case, and it was her perception that Marcella was throwing herself headlong into a hopeless struggle — together with something else — a confession perhaps of a touch of greatness in the girl's temper, passionate and violent as it was, that had led to this unwonted softness of manner, this absence of sarcasm.

Very much the same thought — only treated as a nameless horror not to be recognised or admitted — was in Marcella's mind also, joined however with another, unsuspected even by Mrs. Boyce's acuteness. "Very likely — when I tell him — he will not want to marry me at all — and of course I shall tell him."

But not yet — certainly not yet. She had the instinctive sense that during the next few weeks she should want all her dignity with Aldous, that she could not afford to put herself at a disadvantage with

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him. To be troubled about her own sins at such a moment would be like the meanness of the lazy and canting Christian, who whines about saving his soul while he ought to be rather occupied with feeding the bodies of his wife and children.

A ring at the front door. Marcella rose, leaning one hand on the end of the sofa — a long slim figure in her black dress — haggard and pathetic.

When Aldous entered, her face was one question. He went up to her and took her hand.

"In the case of Westall the verdict is one of 'Wilful Murder' against Hurd. In that of poor Charlie Dynes the court is adjourned. Enough evidence has been taken to justify burial. But there is news to-night that one of the Widrington gang has turned informer, and the police say they will have their hands on them all within the next two or three days."

Marcella withdrew herself from him and fell back into the corner of the sofa. Shading her eyes with her hand she tried to be very composed and business-like.

"Was Hurd himself examined?"

"Yes, under the new Act. He gave the account which he gave to you and to his wife. But the Court —"

"Did not believe it?"

"No. The evidence of motive was too strong. It was clear from his own account that he was out for poaching purposes, that he was leading the Oxford gang, and that he had a gun while Westall was unarmed. He admitted too that Westall called on him

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to give up the bag of pheasants he held, and the gun. He refused. Then he says Westall came at him, and he fired. Dick Patton and one or two others gave evidence as to the language he has habitually used about Westall for months past."

"Cowards — curs!" cried Marcella, clenching both her hands, a kind of sob in her throat.

Aldous, already white and careworn, showed, Mrs. Boyce thought, a ray of indignation for an instant. Then he resumed steadily —

"And Brown, our steward, gave evidence as to his employment since October. The coroner summed up carefully, and I think fairly, and the verdict was given about half-past six."

"They took him back to prison?"

"Of course. He comes before the magistrates on Thursday."

"And you will be one!"

The girl's tone was indescribable.

Aldous started. Mrs. Boyce reddened with anger, and checking her instinct to intervene began to put away her working materials that she might leave them together. While she was still busy Aldous said:

"You forget; no magistrate ever tries a case in which he is personally concerned. I shall take no part in the trial. My grandfather, of course, must prosecute."

"But it will be a bench of landlords," cried Marcella; "of men with whom a poacher is already condemned."

"You are unjust to us, I think," said Aldous,

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slowly, after a pause, during which Mrs. Boyce left the room — "to some of us, at any rate. Besides, as of course you know, the case will be simply sent on for trial at the assizes. By the way" — his tone changed — "I hear to-night that Harry Wharton undertakes the defence."

"Yes," said Marcella, defiantly. "Is there anything to say against it? You wouldn't wish Hurd not to be defended, I suppose?"

"Marcella!"

Even her bitter mood was pierced by the tone. She had never wounded him so deeply yet, and for a moment he felt the situation intolerable; the surging grievance and reproach, with which his heart was really full, all but found vent in an outburst which would have wholly swept away his ordinary measure and self-control. But then, as he looked at her, it struck his lover's sense painfully how pale and miserable she was. He could not scold! But it came home to him strongly that for her own sake and his it would be better there should be explanations. After all things had been going untowardly for many weeks. His nature moved slowly and with much self-doubt, but it was plain to him now that he must make a stand.

After his cry, her first instinct was to apologise. Then the words stuck in her throat. To her, as to him, they seemed to be close on a trial of strength. If she could not influence him in this matter — so obvious, as it seemed to her, and so near to her heart — what was to become of that lead of hers in their married life, on which she had been reckoning from

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the beginning? All that was worst in her and all that was best rose to the struggle.

But, as he did not speak, she looked up at last.

"I was waiting," he said in a low voice.

"What for?"

"Waiting till you should tell me you did not mean what you said."

She saw that he was painfully moved; she also saw that he was introducing something into their relation, an element of proud self-assertion, which she had never felt in it before. Her own vanity instantly rebelled.

"I ought not to have said exactly what I did," she said, almost stifled by her own excitement, and making great efforts not to play the mere wilful child; "that I admit. But it has been clear to me from the beginning that — that" — her words hurried, she took up a book and restlessly lifted it and let it fall — "you have never looked at this thing justly. You have looked at the crime as any one must who is a landowner; you have never allowed for the provocation; you have not let yourself feel pity —"

He made an exclamation.

"Do you know where I was before I went into the inquest?"

"No," she said defiantly, determined not to be impressed, feeling a childish irritation at the interruption.

"I was with Mrs. Westall. Harden and I went in to see her. She is a hard, silent woman. She is clearly not popular in the village, and no one comes in to her. Her" — he hesitated — "her baby is ex-

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pected before long. She is in such a state of shock and excitement that Clarke thinks it quite possible she may go out of her mind. I saw her sitting by the fire, quite silent, not crying, but with a wild eye that means mischief. We have sent in a nurse to help Mrs. Jellison watch her. She seems to care nothing about her boy. Everything that that woman most desired in life has been struck from her at a blow. Why? That a man who was in no stress of poverty, who had friends and employment, should indulge himself in acts which he knew to be against the law, and had promised you and his wife to forego, and should at the same time satisfy a wild beast's hatred against the man, who was simply defending his master's property. Have *you* no pity for Mrs. Westall or her child?"

He spoke as calmly as he could, making his appeal to reason and moral sense; but, in reality, every word was charged with electric feeling.

"I *am* sorry for her!" cried Marcella, passionately. "But, after all, how can one feel for the oppressor, or those connected with him, as one does for the victim?" He shook his head, protesting against the word, but she rushed on. "You *do* know — for I told you yesterday — how under the shelter of this *hateful* game system Westall made Hurd's life a burden to him when he was a young man — how he had begun to bully him again this past year. We had the same sort of dispute the other day about that murder in Ireland. You were shocked that I would not condemn the Moonlighters who had shot their landlord from behind a hedge, as you did. You said the man

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had tried to do his duty, and that the murder was brutal and unprovoked. But I thought of the *system* — of the *memories* in the minds of the murderers. There *were* excuses — he suffered for his father — I am not going to judge that as I judge other murders. So, when a Czar of Russia is blown up, do you expect one to think only of his wife and children? No! I will think of the tyranny and the revolt; I will pray, yes, *pray* that I might have courage to do as they did! You may think me wild and mad. I dare say. I am made so. I shall always feel so!"

She flung out her words at him, every limb quivering under the emotion of them. His cool, penetrating eye, this manner she had never yet known in him, exasperated her.

"Where was the tyranny in this case?" he asked her quietly. "I agree with you that there are murders and murders. But I thought your point was that here was neither murder nor attack, but only an act of self-defence. That is Hurd's plea."

She hesitated and stumbled. "I know," she said, "I know. I believe it. But, even if the attack had been on Hurd's part, I should still find excuses, because of the system, and because of Westall's hatefulness."

He shook his head again.

"Because a man is harsh and masterful, and uses stinging language, is he to be shot down like a dog?"

There was a silence. Marcella was lashing herself up by thoughts of the deformed man in his cell, looking forward after the wretched, unsatisfied life, which was all society had allowed him, to the violent death

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by which society would get rid of him — of the wife yearning her heart away — of the boy, whom other human beings, under the name of law, were about to separate from his father for ever. At last she broke out thickly and indistinctly:

"The terrible thing is that I cannot count upon you — that now I cannot make you feel as I do — feel with me. And by-and-by, when I shall want your help desperately, when your help might be everything — I suppose it will be no good to ask it."

He started, and bending forward he possessed himself of both her hands — her hot trembling hands — and kissed them with a passionate tenderness.

"What help will you ask of me that I cannot give? That would be hard to bear!"

Still held by him, she answered his question by another:

"Give me your idea of what will happen. Tell me how you think it will end."

"I shall only distress you, dear," he said sadly.

"No; tell me. You think him guilty. You believe he will be convicted."

"Unless some wholly fresh evidence is forthcoming," he said reluctantly, "I can see no other issue."

"Very well; then he will be sentenced to death. But, after sentence — I know — that man from Widrington, that solicitor told me — if — if strong influence is brought to bear — if anybody whose word counts — if Lord Maxwell and you, were to join the movement to save him — There is sure to be a movement — the Radicals will take it up. Will you do it — will you promise me now — for my sake?"

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He was silent.

She looked at him, all her heart burning in her eyes, conscious of her woman's power too, and pressing it.

"If that man is hung," she said pleadingly, "it will leave a mark on my life nothing will ever smooth out. I shall feel myself somehow responsible. I shall say to myself, if I had not been thinking about my own selfish affairs — about getting married — about the straw-plaiting — I might have seen what was going on. I might have saved these people, who have been my friends — my *real* friends — from this horror."

She drew her hands away and fell back on the sofa, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes. "If you had seen her this morning!" she said in a strangled voice. "She was saying, 'Oh, miss, if they do find him guilty, they can't hang him — not my poor deformed Jim, that never had a chance of being like the others. Oh, we'll beg so hard. I know there's many people will speak for him. He was mad, miss, when he did it. He'd never been himself, not since last winter, when we all sat and starved, and he was driven out of his senses by thinking of me and the children. You'll get Mr. Raeburn to speak — won't you, miss? — and Lord Maxwell? It was their game. I know it was their game. But they'll forgive him. They're such great people, and so rich — and we — we've always had such a struggle. Oh, the bad times we've had, and no one know! They'll try and get him off, miss? Oh, I'll go and *beg* of them.'"

She stopped, unable to trust her voice any further.

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He stooped over her and kissed her brow. There was a certain solemnity in the moment for both of them. The pity of human fate overshadowed them. At last he said firmly, yet with great feeling:

"I will not prejudge anything, that I promise you. I will keep my mind open to the last. But — I should like to say — it would not be any easier to me to throw myself into an agitation for reprieve because this man was tempted to crime by *my* property — on *my* land. I should think it right to look at it altogether from the public point of view. The satisfaction of my own private compunctions — of my own private feelings — is not what I ought to regard. My own share in the circumstances, in the conditions which made such an act possible does indeed concern me deeply. You cannot imagine but that the moral problem of it has possessed me ever since this dreadful thing happened. It troubled me much before. Now, it has become an oppression — a torture. I have never seen my grandfather so moved, so distressed, in all my remembrance of him. Yet he is a man of the old school, with the old standards. As for me, if ever I come to the estate I will change the whole system, I will run no risks of such human wreck and ruin as this — "

His voice faltered.

"But," he resumed, speaking steadily again, "I ought to warn you that such considerations as these will not affect my judgment of this particular case. In the first place, I have no quarrel with capital punishment as such. I do not believe we could rightly give it up. Your attitude properly means that wher-

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ever we can legitimately feel pity for a murderer, we should let him escape his penalty. I, on the other hand, believe that if the murderer saw things as they truly are, he would himself *claim* his own death, as his best chance, his only chance — in this mysterious universe! — of self-recovery. Then it comes to this — was the act murder? The English law of murder is not perfect, but it appears to me to be substantially just, and guided by it —"

"You talk as if there were no such things as mercy and pity in the world," she interrupted wildly; "as if law were not made and administered by men of just the same stuff and fabric as the lawbreaker!"

He looked troubled.

"Ah, but *law* is something beyond laws or those who administer them," he said in a lower tone; "and the law — the *obligation-sense* — of our own race and time, however imperfect it may be, is sacred, not because it has been imposed upon us from without, but because it has grown up to what it is, out of our own best life — ours, yet not ours — the best proof we have, when we look back at it in the large, when we feel its work in ourselves of some diviner power than our own will — our best clue to what that power may be!"

He spoke at first, looking away — wrestling out his thought, as it were, by himself — then turning back to her, his eyes emphasised the appeal implied, though not expressed, in what he said — intense appeal to her for sympathy, forbearance, mutual respect, through all acuteness of difference. His look both promised and implored.

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He had spoken to her but very rarely or indirectly as yet of his own religious or philosophical beliefs. She was in a stage when such things interested her but little, and reticence in personal matters was so much the law of his life that even to her expansion was difficult. So that — inevitably — she was arrested, for the moment, as any quick perception must be, by the things that unveil character.

Then an upheaval of indignant feeling swept the impression away. All that he said might be ideally, profoundly true — *but* — the red blood of the common life was lacking in every word of it! He ought to be incapable of saying it *now*. Her passionate question was, how could he *argue* — how could he hold and mark the ethical balance — when a *woman* was suffering, when *children* were to be left fatherless? Besides — the ethical balance itself — does it not alter according to the hands that hold it — poacher or landlord, rich or poor?

But she was too exhausted to carry on the contest in words. Both felt it would have to be renewed. But she said to herself secretly that Mr. Wharton, when he got to work, would alter the whole aspect of affairs. And she knew well that her vantage-ground as towards Aldous was strong.

Then at last he was free to turn his whole attention for a little to her and her physical state, which made him miserable. He had never imagined that any one, vigorous and healthy as she was, could look so worn out in so short a time. She let him talk to her — lament, entreat, advise — and at last she took advantage of his anxiety and her admissions to come to the point, to plead that the marriage should be put off.

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She used the same arguments that she had done to her mother.

"How can I bear to be thinking of these things?" — she pointed a shaking finger at the dress patterns lying scattered on the table — "with this agony, this death, under my eyes?"

It was a great blow to him, and the practical inconveniences involved were great. But the fibre of him — of which she had just felt the toughness — was delicate and sensitive as her own, and after a very short recoil he met her with great chivalry and sweetness, agreeing that everything should be put off for six weeks, till Easter in fact. She would have been very grateful to him but that something — some secret thought — checked the words she tried to say.

"I must go home then," he said, rising and trying to smile. "I shall have to make things straight with Aunt Neta, and set a great many arrangements in train. Now, you will *try* to think of something else? Let me leave you with a book that I can imagine you will read."

She let herself be tended and thought for. At the last, just as he was going, he said:

"Have you seen Mr. Wharton at all since this happened?"

His manner was just as usual. She felt that her eye was guilty, but the darkness of the firelit room shielded her.

"I have not seen him since we met him in the drive. I saw the solicitor who is working up the case for him yesterday. He came over to see Mrs. Hurd and me. I had not thought of asking him, but

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we agreed that, if he would undertake it, it would be the best chance."

"It *is* probably the best chance," said Aldous, thoughtfully. "I believe Wharton has not done much at the Bar since he was called, but that, no doubt, is because he has had so much on his hands in the way of journalism and politics. His ability is enough for anything, and he will throw himself into this. I do not think Hurd could do better."

She did not answer. She felt that he was magnanimous, but felt it coldly, without emotion.

He came and stooped over her.

"Good-night — good-night — tired child — dear heart! When I saw you in that cottage this morning I thought of the words, 'Give, and it shall be given unto you.' All that my life can do to pour good measure, pressed down, running over, into yours, I vowed you then!"

When the door closed upon him, Marcella, stretched in the darkness, shed the bitterest tears that had ever yet been hers — tears which transformed her youth — which baptised her, as it were, into the fulness of our tragic life.

She was still weeping when she heard the door softly opened. She sprang up and dried her eyes, but the little figure that glided in was not one to shrink from. Mary Harden came and sat down beside her.

"I knew you would be miserable. Let me come and cry too. I have been my round — have seen them all — and I came to bring you news."

"How has she taken — the verdict?" asked Mar-

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cella, struggling with her sobs, and succeeding at last in composing herself.

"She was prepared for it. Charlie told her when he saw her after you left this afternoon that she must expect it."

There was a pause.

"I shall soon hear, I suppose," said Marcella, in a hardening voice, her hands round her knees, "what Mr. Wharton is doing for the defence. He will appear before the magistrates, I suppose."

"Yes; but Charlie thinks the defence will be mainly reserved. Only a little more than a fortnight to the assizes! The time is so short. But now this man has turned informer, they say the case is quite straightforward. With all the other evidence the police have there will be no difficulty in trying them all. Marcella!"

"Yes."

Had there been light enough to show it, Mary's face would have revealed her timidity.

"Marcella, Charlie asked me to give you a message. He begs you not to — not to make Mrs. Hurd hope too much. He himself believes there is no hope, and it is not kind."

"Are you and he like all the rest," cried Marcella, her passion breaking out again, "only eager to have blood for blood?"

Mary waited an instant.

"It has almost broken Charlie's heart," she said at last; "but he thinks it was murder, and that Hurd will pay the penalty; nay, more" — she spoke with a kind of religious awe in her gentle voice — "that he

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ought to be glad to pay it. He believes it to be God's will, and I have heard him say that he would even have executions in public again — under stricter regulations of course — that we may not escape, as we always do if we can — from all sight and thought of God's justice and God's punishments."

Marcella shuddered and rose. She almost threw Mary's hand away from her.

"Tell your brother from me, Mary," she said, "that his God is to *me* just a constable in the service of the English game-laws! If He *is* such a one, I at least will fling my Everlasting No at him while I live."

And she swept from the room, leaving Mary aghast.

Meanwhile there was consternation and wrath at Maxwell Court, where Aldous, on his return from Mellor, had first of all given his great-aunt the news of the coroner's verdict, and had then gone on to break to her the putting-off of the marriage. His championship of Marcella in the matter, and his disavowal of all grievance were so quiet and decided, that Miss Raeburn had been only able to allow herself a very modified strain of comment and remonstrance, so long as he was still there to listen. But she was all the more outspoken when he was gone, and Lady Winterbourne was sitting with her. Lady Winterbourne, who was at home alone, while her husband was with a married daughter on the Riviera, had come over to dine *tête-à-tête* with her friend, finding it impossible to remain solitary while so much was happening.

"Well, my dear," said Miss Raeburn, shortly, as her

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guest entered the room, "I may as well tell you at once that Aldous's marriage is put off."

"Put off!" exclaimed Lady Winterbourne, bewildered. "Why it was only Thursday that I was discussing it all with Marcella, and she told me everything was settled."

"Thursday! — I dare say!" said Miss Raeburn, stitching away with fiery energy, "but since then a poacher has murdered one of our gamekeepers, which makes all the difference."

"What *do* you mean, Agneta?"

"What I say, my dear. The poacher was Marcella's friend, and she cannot now distract her mind from him sufficiently to marry Aldous, though every plan he has in the world will be upset by her proceedings. And as for his election, you may depend upon it she will never ask or know whether he gets in next Monday or no. That goes without saying. She is meanwhile absorbed with the poacher's defence, *Mr. Wharton*, of course, conducting it. This is your modern young woman, my dear — typical, I should think."

Miss Raeburn turned her buttonhole in fine style, and at lightning speed, to show the coolness of her mind, then with a rattling of all her lockets, looked up and waited for Lady Winterbourne's reflections.

"She has often talked to me of these people — the Hurds," said Lady Winterbourne, slowly. "She has always made special friends with them. Don't you remember she told us about them that day she first came back to lunch?"

"Of course I remember! That day she lectured

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Maxwell, at first sight, on his duties. She began well. As for these people," said Miss Raeburn, more slowly, "one is, of course, sorry for the wife and children, though I am a good deal sorrier for Mrs. Westall, and poor, poor Mrs. Dynes. The whole affair has so upset Maxwell and me, we have hardly been able to eat or sleep since. I thought it made Maxwell look dreadfully old this morning, and with all that he has got before him too! I shall insist on sending for Clarke to-morrow morning if he does not have a better night. And now this postponement will be one more trouble — all the engagements to alter, and the invitations. *Really!* that girl."

And Miss Raeburn broke off short, feeling simply that the words which were allowed to a well-bred person were wholly inadequate to her state of mind.

"But if she feels it — as you or I might feel such a thing about some one we knew or cared for, Agneta?"

"How can she feel it like that?" cried Miss Raeburn, exasperated. "How can she know any one of — of that class well enough? It is not seemly, I tell you, Adelaide, and I don't believe it is sincere. It's just done to make herself conspicuous, and show her power over Aldous. For other reasons too, if the truth were known!"

Miss Raeburn turned over the shirt she was making for some charitable society and drew out some tacking threads with a loud noise which relieved her. Lady Winterbourne's old and delicate cheek had flushed.

"I'm sure it's sincere," she said with emphasis. "Do you mean to say, Agneta, that one can't sympa-

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thise, in such an awful thing, with people of another class, as one would with one's own flesh and blood?"

Miss Raeburn winced. She felt for a moment the pressure of a democratic world — a hated, formidable world — through her friend's question. Then she stood to her guns.

"I dare say you'll think it sounds bad," she said stoutly; "but in my young days it would have been thought a piece of posing — of sentimentalism — something indecorous and unfitting — if a girl had put herself in such a position. Marcella *ought* to be absorbed in her marriage; that is the natural thing. How Mrs. Boyce can allow her to mix herself with such things as this murder — to *live* in that cottage, as I hear she has been doing, passes my comprehension."

"You mean," said Lady Winterbourne, dreamily, "that if one had been very fond of one's maid, and she died, one wouldn't put on mourning for her. Marcella would."

"I dare say," said Miss Raeburn, snappishly. "She is capable of anything far-fetched and theatrical."

The door opened and Hallin came in. He had been suffering of late, and much confined to the house. But the news of the murder had made a deep and painful impression upon him, and he had been eagerly acquainting himself with the facts. Miss Raeburn, whose kindness ran with unceasing flow along the channels she allowed it, was greatly attached to him in spite of his views, and she now threw herself upon him for sympathy in the matter of the wedding. In any grievance that concerned Aldous she counted

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upon him, and her shrewd eyes had plainly perceived that he had made no great friendship with Marcella.

"I am very sorry for Aldous," he said at once; "but I understand *her* perfectly. So does Aldous."

Miss Raeburn was angrily silent. But when Lord Maxwell, who had been talking with Aldous, came in, he proved, to her final discomfiture, to be very much of the same opinion.

"My dear," he said wearily as he dropped into his chair, his old face grey and pinched, "this thing is too terrible — the number of widows and orphans that night's work will make before the end breaks my heart to think of. It will be a relief not to have to consider festivities while these men are actually before the courts. What I am anxious about is that Marcella should not make herself ill with excitement. The man she is interested in will be hung, must be hung; and with her somewhat volatile, impulsive nature — "

He spoke with old-fashioned discretion and measure. Then quickly he pulled himself up, and, with some trivial question or other, offered his arm to Lady Winterbourne, for Aldous had just come in, and dinner was ready.

END OF VOL. I.

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